THE FORBIDDEN MAN

Will W. Whalen

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THE IRISH SPARROW
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THE GIRL WHO FOUGHT
THE EX-NUN
THE GIRL FROM MINE RUN
STRIKE
THE GOLDEN SQUAW
TWILIGHT TALKS TO TIRED HEARTS

THE FORBIDDEN MAN

By

WILL W. WHALEN

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To the Brave Boys Who Marched Away with the Flare of Trumpets and Fluttering of Banners, and Dragged Back to Face the Tragedy of Being Forgotten

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THE FORBIDDEN MAN

CHAPTER I

Frank Snow felt mighty much alone, not only in New York City, but in the whole round world, as he elbowed his way along 149th Street at Third Avenue. A matinee crowd was pouring out from the Bronx Opera House, where a depressing play was holding forth this week. Frank listlessly looked the crowd over, and saw there were at least ninety women to one man—and that play was for men particularly.

Women could never mind their own business; they must try to find out a lot of things that weren't good for them. Mother Eve all over again, renewing herself and her original blunder in her daughters. What a deal of mischief the female of the species had done God's grand old planet! Yes, it was a great, grand old world, in spite of women and war and shell shock and wounds and *theatres*. Theatres! he felt ice melt between his shoulder blades and

ooze down his spine. Theatres! Frank wouldn't attend even a picture show. And there was nobody to tell him he'd have enjoyed life more if he did. Who cared really whether he enjoyed life or not; whether he lived or died or got a fit?

He was an ex-soldier, now an ex-patient from a soldiers' hospital; fresh down came he from the heights of the Pennsylvania mountains. The war had disappointed him. He entered the conflict to die and survived half dead. What price glory? Glory? Halleluiah! what did it all amount to? The Lord knows he'd won enough honors and even a medal, but that medal wouldn't purchase a pair of socks. Too, he was acquainted with some others who had medals, got only God knew why.

He'd met them all: the heroes who stayed home and fought in their minds and told the world how it should be done. The writers, some with military titles that didn't gee with their round unmilitary shoulders and rounder paunch; who swirled in swivel-chairs, and wore costly rugs to threads with their restless, nervous, carpet-slippered heels, while they pounded out reams of shameless propaganda, whether in novels or in just barefaced pleas for patriot-

ism. Those writers didn't lose, whether their country gained. They became parlor benefactors, somebodies to be gabbled about between sessions of bridge; even lecturers to hold fat, overfed women in awe for an hour. And last but not least, their propaganda plots whirled and blinded one in the flickering tintypes, where you paid your money at the box office with war tax. And the crazy women who dared everything, even decency; even love, if a soldier didn't watch his harassed step.

Yes, the worst horrors of the war were inflicted by those that didn't fight at all.

Now after fighting right up to the Armistice, Frank Snow was having a new fight with the begrudging Veterans' Bureau about compensation. That band of doctors made him feel like forty thieves. From the oldest to the youngest, those physicians quacked at him and flapped contemptuous wings, as milk-fed drakes would at a sick game rooster. Any good that might eventually accrue to him was gone already from that possible or impossible financial success. He smiled grimly as he thought that perhaps that Wingless Victory was minus pinions because the sly moths of peace ate up her plumage.

If he could only garner enough energy to accomplish a man's day's work, he wouldn't bother the Vets'. Bureau much; but he wasn't quite sure of his nerves, after that sizzling shrapnel wound and the worse sizzling trench fever, and that shell shock which might creep back and make him a madman again. If only he didn't do anybody any harm, should a paroxysm return!

What matter about himself? Life had cheated him to his two eyes at every turn. It was that intense disgust with living that made him battle like a reckless Indian with Uncle Sam's 76th Field Artillery. Frank wasn't afraid of death. He was more afraid of life; almost wanted to run away from it. All because in his boyish innocence he'd plucked the fruit of love and was poisoned by it.

He was out of uniform now; forever, he hoped. Yet even in his mufti the ladies smirked at him; the flappers ogling brazenly. You see Frank Snow was a man who didn't sense to the full his own good looks and splendid upstanding physique, which the army training had perfected and which even the hospital internment hadn't spoiled. He had a schoolboy face with a bit of an Irish twist in his smile, though all the

tragedy of No Man's Land was buried in the depths of his large fine eyes. Nature herself was merciful enough to his face and figure; he didn't at all seem his twenty-five or twenty-six years.

Last week he'd hung bitterly over the open grave of his buddy, Barney Kennedy, one of the whitest kids that ever slipped into khaki. Ugh, the girl that poor Barney'd married and who, he fancied, loved him! There *was* a disappointment. The light that lies in woman's eyes —and lies and lies; also the tongue between her rosy lips. Even a lot of that eye light was purchased for a price in the drug stores. With the art of make-up gone to its newest outlandish extreme, who knew what a woman really looked like when she appeared as the daughter of Mother Nature and not as the foster child of Dame Fashion?

Frank himself would have taken his oath that Vera was all right, when she wasn't at all. No wonder Barney went headlong down into the trench her penciled eyes dug for him.

It was the uniform, not the boy in it, that trapped her fickle attention. In plain clothes, that too modern beauty found her soldier husband unattractive and boring; and when he

was in the position of a crippled feller who needed a friend-wife, Vera played deserter. Nevertheless, half of Barney's compensation slid monthly into her vanity bag, whence it came out in chunks for the beauty doctors who made a better job out of her than the medical doctors did out of Barney. Oh, hang it! as if men outside of novels wanted their wives always dolled up! Husbands desired a woman, not a kewpie, with bovine orbs, circus poster mouth and cheeks that would infuriate a gentleman cow. Charms might strike a man's vision and knock the eye out of his common sense, but merit won his heart.

Really Vera didn't need Barney's money and shouldn't have claimed it. It was worse than stealing pennies from a dead man's eyes, that taking money out of a dying man's too willing fingers. Oh, Barney, you big-hearted young fool! God rest you! A poor wife she was, though such a gorgeous war bride. Mayhap—Frank honestly nosed this out for himself—it was her dream to be converted into a war widow with lots of insurance to spend on clinging black draperies. Her ash-blond beauty would pair off well with weeds. God forgive her and all like her that preyed on unwary

soldier boys, homesick, heartsick, weary, worn; yearning for a woman's tenderness; just a mad crowd of overgrown kiddies!

Barney had felt bitterness, not toward her so much as toward life in general. That was the real reason he didn't recover; he didn't care enough to get well and fight the future. Peace had its victims no less than war. War blasted a man to rags and God took him. Peace might shoot a man's soul to bits, and he'd go to hell.

But before Barney went west in the hospital, Vera herself was taken out of a world whose corners she brightened with her flashy, artificial-looking hair and no less artificial smile. A swift and pitiless attack of pneumonia, the outcome of a shamelessly sheer frock, a moonlight night and dance, where she was addressed as "Miss," laid her in her unhallowed grave in a week. Vera was less heroic at the grand finale than Barney. His last earthly action was to clutch out blindly, grip the chaplain's hand and kiss the consecrated fingers. Death chilled Barney's lips in that instant. She passed into the eternal shadows, screaming: "I won't die! I will not! I don't want to! I'm—*afraid!*" And when her mama, faultessly coiffured, reasoned with her to be

calm and make a swan-like end of it, the dying girl's last motion was to slap her parent across the mouth, and knock down mama's beautiful hair.

Vera mulcted Barney in life and in death. Her mama sent him to his own bed of misery the bill for the funeral, about which sad solemnity he knew nothing till it was all over: one thousand dollars! Barney sent the money at once, for he'd been saving a long, long time. It wasn't a month later that Barney curled his own battered big body up into a pretzel of agony and gasped out his splendid soul.

Frank Snow had been the chief mourner at that funeral over in Brooklyn this week, but Vera's mama wasn't present in the cortège. How could she be there, the dear dyed old blonde, when her grief and gregariousness had driven her to Florida for the winter, where this evening she was scattering some of the dead soldier's hoardings? Barney had been more unlucky than that poetic soldier of the Legion who was born at Bingen on the Rhine. While there was no lack of woman's nursing in Barney's illness, there was a conspicuous dearth of woman's tears over his coffin.

The earth, pale with snow, shuddered and

seemed sick under the black scowl of the sky which was growing blacker. The lights up and down Third Avenue and 149th Street looked like ineffectual pills to disperse this plague of darkness. Frank, the ex-soldier, drew in out of the rain under the Elevated, and stood away from the crowd, just as he felt away from everybody. Vera certainly didn't love Barney, though how Barney had loved her! Oh, well, God would make it all up to him—and to her too! They were both very wise today!

Yet somehow Frank knew that all women weren't like Vera; no, they were not. His own mother died at the moment of his birth, and never saw the face of her son, but he guessed what mothers were when he saw the old women reclaiming their shattered soldier boys. Oh, that lad who sobbed: "Mom, if I could only die! I'm an oyster; no arms, no legs now!" And the deathless maternal love that pillowed the despairing head on her bosom: "You're my baby just the same. You need me now as you did when first you were born."

And that little German girl who nursed the soldiers at the Pennsylvania hospital, Teenie Cope, was as different from Vera in character as she was in looks, and really Teenie in her

own way was as pretty as Vera, though she hadn't as much "class." Teenie would never crave that style for herself; she had too much good sense.

Thinking now of Teenie, Frank's thoughts sped back to the soldiers' hospital with its fifty patients up there on the mountain-top. There was something more or less wrong with every one of those inmates, of course. No, there had been one perfectly healthy individual among them there in khaki, but he was never a soldier. A government spy, a sort of contemptible stool-pigeon, a wolf in the uniform of a sheep (or a goat?), a snooping detective, who reported to Washington the disgruntled mutterings of the unlucky hero sufferers. Fortunately for himself those war wildcats didn't have that hireling's measurements, or he'd have measured his length in the mud, and wondered what manner of shell struck him. The fellows found out about him only after his departure.

Thanks to Teenie Cope, the sneak left. He fell in love with her, or anyhow he said he did. He must have been sorely smitten, for he incautiously lowered his mask and revealed to her his identity and standing in life, and his real purpose at the sanitarium. She was devoted

to the soldiers and their sufferings, was wearing herself to a ragged thread in their service. She marked in the diary of her mind each sorrowing day and numbered every secret tear of the boys, all the while taking temperatures and measuring pulses. Then she reported to the doctors. She dropped a hint in public about the hero who carried a diary. He saw his day was done, and while the night was filled with the music of the radio, he folded his darling diary into his bosom, and like an Arab, silently stole away.

CHAPTER II

SOME of the soldiers were tormented from the effects of gas, others were plagued with shell shock, but nearly all of them could help themselves. Frank Snow couldn't. After they got the shrapnel wound in his side healed and the trench fever out of him, he developed paralysis, and to the doctors his case was as mysterious as the whole war was to numbers of the fighters.

Teenie Cope made Frank Snow her very special charge. She did more than she was able for all the disease-chained young war dogs. When one came barking at her out of the woods as if the devil and all his imps were at the heels of that shell shock victim, Teenie smiled calmly on the temporary lunatic. She wished she could write—but Teenie wasn't a good speller and of punctuation she didn't know a darn—but how she yearned, that little American fräulein, to bless the purblind world with her impressions at first hand of the glorious after-fruits of war and victory!

And little semi-pagan Teenie, Frank found out, became a Catholic—for his sake. The doctors all despaired of Frank's recovery, but Teenie didn't. She meant to save him—for herself, it was soon evident. She knew he was a Catholic from his scapular and rosary, though those sacramentals weren't an infallible guide. A young Hebrew wore a tiny crucifix continuously about his neck. She invested in a rosary and scapular, and to do the thing completely, for Teenie wasn't one for half-measures, she also secured a few medals; then a catechism, and off she went after the chaplain.

Barney Kennedy warned her candidly that Frank was "a hard-boiled Pape who wouldn't even eat frogs on Friday because they tasted like chicken," and if ever she changed her name to Mrs. Snow, 'twould only be by a priest and in a church with candles and holy water; none of that squire or rectory parlor business in Frank's matrimonial objective. Anyhow Teenie liked candles and altars and beautiful vestments—and she sort of thought they went with a handsome young man like Frank Snow, whose boyish beauty even this long illness didn't obliterate. Once up on his sturdy legs again, he'd be a prince charming.

Then weary little Teenie grumbled as the time dragged on, like a snake with a broken back. She grumbled a bit at God. Since everybody else was forgetting the soldiers so fast, why should He follow suit? Wasn't she herself going to Mass often and often during the week when she could spare the time, and since one good turn deserves another, God might go out of His way a little and give poor Frank, her adored Pape, at least pep enough to make him walk again? It broke her kind girl-matron little heart to push the wheel-chair hither and yon, and it was hard to entertain the man she loved, and who certainly didn't know a thing about her love.

How could he know? But she wanted him to know. He sat listening to her as if the two parts of his brain were in battle, one heeding her, the other repeating the horrors of the Argonne. If there was any human salvation for Frank Snow, surely it would be Teenie. A nurse who didn't feel so keenly in his regard would simply do what she must, then leave the stultified young man to his own devices. That most likely would result in Frank getting worse and finally being found dead in his chair.

But Frank, bad as his physical condition

was, would say his prayers, and often Teenie pushed his rosary into his poor white fingers that were feeling along the lap of his bathrobe like the fingers of the blind. After a while Frank was known as "the bimbo who said his prayers," and the other nurses "razzled" Teenie about her "big-footed St. Aloysius." Since Teenie's own feet were like two flitting mice, Frank's No. 10's were all the more attractive in her sight, and she was ready to lay her heart right down under those twin mighty soles.

"Never you mind," argued Teenie with her friends, "you'll see. God hears his prayers just the same."

"God must be purty dern clever then," jeered a callous second lieutenant, "for Frank don't know what he's saying hisself."

"Oh, don't he?" and she'd turn to Frank: "Say the Hail Mary, like a good boy, won't you?" And Frank's haunting, dreamy, heavy voice would repeat the Angelical Salutation. "Ha!" cried Teenie, "do you hear that, old doubting Thomas?"

"Sing the Marseillaise," mocked the soldier; "go ahead, Frank; you remember the tune; give it to us."

"Let him just try to sing that blame tune,"

threatened an ex-corporal, reaching for a big boot. "Let him warble one bar, and I'll wallop him out of his comer. Every time I hear that haunting melody, I think it's going to rain. Oh, boys, recall our sweet old hikes in them showers. Rain, rain to the tune of the Marseillaise. Rain in our coffee, rain in our soup, rain down the gutter of our spine. I think all's wrong wit' most of us we've got water on the brain or the kneecap. No wonder the poor old king and sweet Mrs. Dew Berry rushed to the guillotine. I'd meet any ax gladly wit' my neck if the band was playing the sweet Marseillaise. Say, Frank, snap out of it and sing us It Ain't Gonna Rain No Mo'."

"Ha!" Teenie was jubilant, "he won't sing! he won't sing! But you just tell him to pray once't."

"Frank," and the lieutenant simulated Teenie's coaxing tones, "Aloysius, give us all your blessing; get up on your pins and inwoke the Holy Spurt down on us."

But Frank never moved, nor did he make a sign. It was always Teenie's victory, but the soldiers and even the doctors drew lots of fun out of the serious little German nurse and her praying St. Aloysius.

An old moving picture came to the place, Leah Kleshna, a crook story. Ethel Clayton was the yellow-haired, undersized heroine. Teenie the nurse closely resembled Ethel the picture star, so the boys for days teased her by calling her "Leah" and even "Lena." She pretended to get furious, which only added to their delight in bawling, "Leah! Leah! *Lena!* Lay-na!" They were so like children, easily amused. In the underworld story the two seasoned men were trying to break open some sort of infernal machine or maybe pick a lock. Leah Kleshna watched their futile efforts with twinkling eyes, then calmly plucked a hairpin from behind her ear, and in a couple of minutes had the machine in pieces. Woman's mighty mite!

A thunder storm came up, and the shell shock victims were mumbling, hysterical and weeping. Teenie had wheeled Frank down the lane to a little cottage, and they were sitting on the porch, his lank hands too listless to hold the arbutus she'd piled in his lap. She was busy sewing. She did that and talked at the same time; talked, talked to a man who rarely paid attention. If only—only she could find just the right thing for Frank! The doctors couldn't;

they'd given him up as a hopeless wreck. God alone with a bolt of information from the blue sky would be his helper. Well, if Frank Snow did die, Teenie would be able to console herself with the thought she'd done what she could; more than any of the other nurses would have done.

But she was very young, so was Frank, and life is a dreary proposition with only buried love and the thought of duty fulfilled. And why, argued Teenie, should the good die young, and the bad wilt at eighty with their boots on?

The riot in the heavens drew Frank's wandering attention. The rain pelting in his face he heeded little. It was so soft and warm, like tears of the passionate, feminine sky with its capricious moods, that the careful little nurse knew the wet wouldn't hurt him. Up there was the answer to her daily prayer, for she often said the rosary and had Frank join with her. Somewhere behind all the smashing terror and flashing threat, a Divine Providence kept His information to Himself. Why couldn't He tell her in a streak of inspiration; tell her what the baffled doctors wanted to know?

She began to wax resentful. Perhaps it was

her nerves, for she was overworking, and anyhow she was scared stiff by thunder and lightning. She wouldn't be here on the porch now if she could have reached the hospital in time.

She cast an anguished look at the blank face by her side, and in a sudden paroxysm of disgust at fate, hurled her scissors down the steps. The point hit a nail, a spark flew. Then all she remembered was a detonation that seemed to split her eardrums, ripped the three steps into splinters, dug the little rosebush out by the roots, and sent the wheel-chair and its adored incumbent rolling down the garden. She never could tell afterwards how long she lay in the grass, but the rain cascading in a sudden Niagara, floated her back to consciousness. She started up and screamed.

Dear God, where was Frank? The chair? She fled down the sloping garden. The chair was smashed up against the fence, her patient, her man who said his prayers gone. Like an insane, shell-shocked thing herself, the little German girl, disdaining the raging storm and the hissing lightnings, tore her way through the pines, the trees and bushes clawing her dress to flitters. She lost her cap but didn't know it. She was wet to the bone and didn't

care; her feet squelching in her water-filled shoes.

Then she lifted her unbelieving eyes to see the object of her search talking to an astonished doctor, and swinging wide his big arms as if to embrace the woman who worshipped him. Frank, when she came up with tears and rain running down her happy cheeks, looked at her with the gaze of a *stranger!* He disliked her yellow hair at once, he remembered that now. He'd hate yellow-haired women forever! Poor Teenie, as if she could help her flaxen braids, and she'd have dyed if he asked her, or shaved her head like a convict and worn a wig.

"The lightning hit you," she explained, smiling timidly into his face, and noting the blood purling back under his waxy skin. "It was just the shock you needed."

"But where?" asked Frank. "I don't feel any bad effects; I feel born all over again. *Where* did the lightning hit me?"

"Oh, on the back porch," was Teenie's confused explanation. She was ready now for a good shower of delicious tears. "My old scissors did it."

So it was Teenie who'd saved him from the grave that yawned at his feet and into which

he'd been slipping, and which had swallowed Barney Kennedy because Vera never cared. And now he didn't even value Teenie's friendship just because she had yellow hair. Vera Kennedy's bob was almost that same hue, and so was the hair of that other woman—that beautiful, blemished angel from the pits of the damned.

The hospital made holiday that evening. Leah Kleshna's hairpin and Teenie's scissors furnished the *pièce de resistance* for conversation. The movie which hadn't yet been returned was repeated to cheers.

"Ain't it orful what women do do!" commented the second lieutenant, putting a caressing finger on the boil that was blossoming on the back of his neck. "They even prowoke the heavens to strike 'em sober."

"Deliler took the starch out of Samson wit' her scissors, but at 'at, she ain't got nuthin on Teenie Cope," added the ex-corporal. "She even got old Jupitar Toe-Nails to shoot barrage at her objective."

Then Frank was able to walk about the mountains with Teenie, even go to Mass with her, and after awhile he *saw!* He still, even tonight in this cold drizzle in New York's Bronx,

remembered the robin trapezing on the branch when Teenie's secret became his too. How could he tell her that he'd never love or marry her; no, not in a thousand years? How could he let her know that even if he did love her, marriage was not for him—now? He had laughed at death dozens of times, but he didn't want to face the death that might creep into her gentle pale-blue eyes. Of course, he'd learned a lot from the other soldiers, besides what he got from Teenie's own faltering lips when she couldn't control herself another moment, and how much Barney Kennedy had told him about the devotion of Teenie.

"She was your walking shadow, Frank, when you yourself hadn't a foot to put under you. *She's* a real woman."

"They all *look* real, Barney, till you find 'em out. All the real women are dead."

So one morning when Teenie had her day off and was gone into town to shop, Frank Snow left the hospital; never to return, he trusted. And Teenie would not see him again ever. It was the only thing for him to do, and he'd done it. But Teenie Cope had shown him that all women, even blondes, were not alike, and certainly most women couldn't be like

Vera who so far as she was able had blasted the life of Barney Kennedy. Of the war and the woman, she had far more to do with that grave in Brooklyn where tonight waved a dirty wet flag.

CHAPTER III

So Frank Snow hesitated lonely there in the chilly rain, homeless, loveless, wondering whether he'd run down to College Avenue to devotions this evening at St. Rita's Church. He preferred to meet women in a pew; there they wouldn't wink at a man.

Two big trucks rumbled by that looked like gigantic potato bugs with their round backs. How many just like them he'd counted on the dreary way into Coblenz! The snow-shoveler going home for his supper, wore odd boots. Just such boots had Frank's hungry eyes descried on that long, hog-awful hike into the land of Wilhelm and Big Bertha. A boyish form was lying by the road, the arms flung over the face, the legs outstretched. Oh, the hundreds of twisted victims he'd seen like that! Barney Kennedy gave Frank his elbow in the ribs and advised in his war gong of a voice:

"Pipe that guy's pins. About the same size as yours. I see that your feet are bleeding, my

son, and you certainly feel it. Your soles are gone, and so is that guy. He won't mind about cold feet—now. Maybe he's got a reserved seat on red-hot bricks by this."

So Frank fell out of line, and was tugging the boots off the prostrate soldier when he suffered an indignant kick in the neck.

"Say, can't a guy have no nap wit'out being robbed of his duds? What d'ye want to do; treat me corns? What's eating you? I ain't dead—yet."

And in a minute more the recumbent hero was sleeping the sleep of exhaustion again.

Just as surprising as when that soldier spoke who'd been voted speechless, now out of the rolling fog popped a quite small girl into Frank's ken. She came tripping daintily along 149th Street. She wore no rubbers and her dress was poor. Even he could observe that much, though he wasn't very close to her. As she started to cross the avenue, she raised a decrepit umbrella. It owned a roof as bad as some of the dugouts in France. A naked steel shot embarrassingly forth and the wretched dome wouldn't work. It half opened, and as she pushed at the clasp with the umbrella tented over her head, the cheap covering tore.

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Frank eying her, understood why some girls took respectable umbrellas by mistake.

Just then a hilarious high-powered auto with a highly charged chauffeur came dashing past the traffic cop, and before Frank's eyes could quite take it in, the girl was swept under the wheels and dragged away. Her miserable umbrella flew near his feet and her rosary, which she'd evidently had in her palm, struck Frank in the face. He caught the beads on the fly. He understood in a flash. The war made him a quick thinker before it stopped his thinking altogether. The driver was a hit-and-run type, every day growing more common.

Frank was still athletic in spite of Mars and doctors and confinement and shell shock and a few other afflictions. He did a flying leap and jumped on the running board, ripped open the door before the excited driver could demur and shot on the brake. The mob that hurriedly massed fore and aft prevented further progress of the chauffeur who saw he was trapped and settled back with a grunt to face the music. New York City is always on the rush as if it hadn't time to stop for its own funeral, but New York wouldn't miss an accident for the world. It's like the small boy and the fires and

the snorting hose-wagon which never pall on him. Accidents are the free shows in New York, and the victim is the one that pays the tax.

Frank did a nose dive under the car. He emerged with a sobbing little creature who was unrecognizable from mud and slush and snow, with blood dripping and clothes torn to shreds. In a trice the big soldier wrapped the tiny form in his great coat and asked somebody to pilot him to a physician. The furious and hefty cop by that had the driver's number, so Frank felt satisfied he'd get all that was coming to him, and no doubt to boot a whole lot that was coming to other drivers like him.

"What would ye mind, ye low-down piker?" roared the minion of the law, and his voice had the clang of a patrol wagon. "Wasn't it bad enough to upset the goil and her modesty widout trying to kill her off entirely? Where d'ye think ye are; in New York's Bron-ix or over in Pennsylvania belike? What's your name? And don't give no false one, mind ye! Get out of that!" and a big hand grabbed the fur collar and yanked the offender from the car.

Going up the physician's stairs, the girl, hardly more than a child, gripped Frank's

neck confidently, and her cold, hard little fingers sent a thrill and chill through his massive body. Could anything have been more helpless than she? And that blasé brute out there would have dragged her to death under the wheels of his pleasure juggernaut.

Only last week a girl was so swept along and her scalp torn off. She died later in the hospital without recovering consciousness. And nobody knew who the murderer was. Another such had knocked down a small boy. The driver, flowing over with ostentatious sympathy, gathered the shattered child into his broad bosom and ordered everybody to stand aside; he must drive to the nearest hospital. Instead he sped into an alley and threw into the gutter the lad who could have been saved by prompt medical attention. The little fellow's stiff, dead body was found, but the big fellow never was. Why leave such knaves to their own conscience, when that was exactly the boon they craved?

Frank always wanted to help somebody, and the smaller they came, the better he liked 'em. He made it easy for unscrupulous tricksters to help themselves where he was concerned. Frank could take care of everybody but himself. His army buddies all said that

and loved him the more for his very weakness. Wasn't it a big man's fine weakness after all, a happy fault? So they borrowed from him when they had town leave or lost their last copper at crap.

"Was it St. Rita herself—I was just coming from the novena—or you that saved me?" the girl whispered, and Frank's attentive ear detected a delicious little Pennsylvania Irish accent; that second or third generation Irish.

In a rush came homesickness for his native state well-nigh drowning him. Why shouldn't he go back to old Pennsylvania, the country where he was born, God's own land at that? "Another victory for St. Rita's," he boomed with a note of "Carry on!" in his tones.

Then he teetered anxiously in the anteroom opening old magazines without seeing them, while the doctor made examination. He really should have gone off about his own business perhaps, but he wanted to know the extent of the girl's injuries, and then didn't she have his coat on? He was admitted after an eternity to find the girl still wearing it; in fact, she was hugging it around her. She was looking a "Peg o' My Heart" picture now, since her saucy face was washed, her Irish red-gold locks tum-

bled all about. How like the bit he had of his dead mother's! One small cut in the back of her neck and innumerable bruises, that was the sum total of her injuries. But her losses were heavy. Gone were her purse and cotton umbrella.

She glanced bravely from the doctor to her rescuer, and the medical man summoned his office boy to run out and search for the pocketbook. The lad grinned in sophisticated fashion behind his cigarette-stained fingers as who should jeer: "A fat chance of recoverin' that jack in a Noo Yo'k bunch, ain't there!" But he obeyed quickly enough and in a short while came back, empty-handed of course.

"What'll ever become of me?" the little Peg lamented. "I've hardly a stitch on my back now, and oh, woe the day! I've lost my grandmother's rosary beads!"

"No, they caught on my nose," cheered Frank, fetching out the old horn rosary.

"So all luck hasn't quit me since I came to this terrible city. If I lost Granny's beads, I'd be hoodooed for life."

She smiled into his eyes, and in that moment something inside Frank told him, encouraged him that God didn't mold faces like hers to

lie; that he mustn't become an utter cynic and despair of the entire female sex. Teenie Cope's face had that same expression, though she was a German, when this girl evidently wasn't. Good women were all akin, where bad women differed as clouded stars differ from one another, though even the worst woman now and then glinted the glory of her sex. Women might debauch their frail bodies, but always something of their fine souls hung on, like a beautiful flag on a ruined ship.

"If you'll let me help you a little further, Miss——?"

"My name's Margaret Cleary, though they all call me Peg."

So her name really was Peg too! How well that name suited her, thought Frank: *Peg!*

"Miss Cleary, there are stores to burn here, clothing stores, I mean." He swiftly pressed his billfold into her reluctant fingers and more swiftly withdrew his hand. "You're not fit to walk in your nervous condition, but if you won't resent my carrying you again—why, no woman minds trying on a dress and coat, does she? even if she is half killed. And of course, you'll keep my overcoat on till the store furnishes you with a coat of your own."

She raised a pair of angel eyes and smiled weakly, shyly at him, but sweetly, helplessly. "What a debt I'll be owing you!"

Frank somehow in that hour felt happy she was in debt to him. Lots of others were, the Lord knows, but didn't worry about it. And certainly the Vets'. Bureau never batted an eye of concern about what Uncle Sam was perfectly willing to give, if the wise-cracking and quacking doctors didn't put their spoke in the wheel.

Again he played St. Christopher and bore Peg o' My Heart into a ladies' store down below on Third Avenue. Yes, he was sure this was a real, honest-to-heaven, cross-my-heart, unspoiled Pennsylvania colleen. What was the child doing in exile here? He puffed a cigarette and trotted up and down outside the big window with its ribbons and laces and whatnots, and its pair of waxen owl-eyed beauties that were less fortunate than Venus de Milo; they had only busts and no arms. The cruel sun had wilted and blemished one lady's nose, and the other looked as if she'd been skinned; she was raw, yellow and greasy. But they wore that same old smile always; possibly because their tresses were so nicely crimped.

Miss Peg Cleary inside was being dolled up in—what? When she came out, looking lovelier than ever, and certainly far lovelier than the crimped and sun-blistered hussies that didn't care who saw them, her color was ebbing back into her cheeks.

"I hope you didn't catch your death of cold," she said with sweet anxiety, helping him into his overcoat. "I should have taken you inside where it's warm, but," she giggled, "sure, 'twas no place at all for your father's son. You'd have got the chills watching us fussing into this and out of that. Men don't dream what a woman suffers in getting a dress."

She squeezed his purse back into his hand, and he felt a nervous twitch in her fingers; the nervousness that was in her giggle. In the taxi trundling along to her aunt's house, she poured forth her thanks like a little child. Though she was surely eighteen, she seemed a schoolgirl, a very mite of a schoolgirl, trying to make her way in the biggest city in the world. Yes, her home was 'way off in the coal regions of Pennsylvania, at Coaltown beyond Mine Run, three miles up the railroad. She was in the city two months, and was sick of it and homesick too. Her mother had warned her not to leave

Coaltown, but you see the times were a bit slack up there, and there was nothing much for a girl to do. Anyhow she was big enough and ugly enough now to help her dad out.

"Not very big at that," remarked Frank shyly, looking at her tiny hands, "and certainly not ugly."

He got for reply that enchanting, nervous little giggle again—sweet as the robin's tweet on the bush when he learned that poor nurse Teenie loved him.

And Peg Cleary had so wanted to see the great world, but God be praised! she wanted to see no more of it. You just felt like a moth flying at a street lamp, which you thought was the moon, and the wind took you and blew you into the middle of next week. You were always going, but you never knew where you'd land or what you'd land up against.

Her aunt, Frank found, was a widow who ran a rooming house and sometimes worked out by the day, when her roomers were scarce; one of the contented draft-horses you find in every city:

> "Great-eyed and mild and ponderously slow,
> Unmoved by the hysteria of the streets."

She too was born in Pennsylvania. Of course, she kept Frank for dinner which she was old-fashioned enough to call supper. He didn't know when he had enjoyed a meal so much, and the cooking was excellent. Confidences were the order of the night, to be sure, and when Mrs. O'Hara knew he came from a patch outside Scranton, she fell to telling stories of her own girlhood around the mines.

"I think I left the best part of me heart up there," she sighed. "Me good man, God rest him! was kilt at the mines, and for nights I laid on the big rock up on the mountain crying the heart out of me. Oh, it was bitter hard! Then one night when it was near day, I felt something cold and clammy again me cheek, and I thought it was the divil himself, for belike I might be flying in the face of God itself. But sure, 'twas only a big toad, and the thing looked as if it pitied me, for it did open its mouth and gap. But never again did I weep another night away. The old places has changed a lot now," she added with a touch of sadness. "There's Irish Valley, outside Shamokin, where they're now all Dutch. Polanders and Hungarians live in the house where me

and Peg's mother were born. The Irish will wander, God help us! Musha, we can't stay put nowhere. Why I wonder as we wander."

"I think it's to let the world know what fine women the Irish are," returned Frank gallantly.

"Ha, would you be saying that now, and me a widow for all those years?" and she winked merrily at Peg, who was flashing perfect teeth in a smile and eyes and red-gold hair under the naked electric bulb. Mrs. O'Hara had stripped the fancy colored shade off the lamp, for she said she preferred light to too much style, and she read a good deal of the night and her prayer-book was pretty faded. "I gave the pink shade with the ruffles on it to one of me roomers, Sara Barry, and she says it do make her nicer when she looks in the glass." "Tweet! tweet!" sang the canary in the cage till Mrs. O'Hara arose and covered it. "You shut up; 'tis your bedtime, Mr. Bird." That canary brought back again the robin that warbled when Teenie Cope was with him outside the sanitarium on the mountain-top. "You seem a bit lonesome yourself, Mr. Snow," she went on with less banter.

"I am, Mrs. O'Hara, honestly lonesome,"

and his strong voice sagged slightly. How he did hate to go out alone into this tremendous city which made him feel so much of a crawling cootie! "I think those of us who come from small villages can never really become town-broke, can we?"

"I wouldn't meself in a hundred years," she admitted, "never. But we must live, all of us, and there's more work in a city, you understand, for women."

"Men are luckier, I think, in the small towns. I've traveled a good deal in my time, and small towns get me."

"Then you won't stay in New York?" asked Peg with keen interest.

"I hardly think so, though it would be a good place for a man to lose himself."

"I'm lost in it always," put in Mrs. O'Hara. "I'm ever on the wrong subway down town. Once I went to Brooklyn instead of the Bronx, and I might a been going yet, only we reached the end of the line. Then coming back I lit into the Jew quarter. I got all kinds of looks from all kinds of people, but the Irish cop pult me out. I came home exhausted. That night I dreamed of black whiskers, whole bushes of 'em, growing down from the ceiling

and up on the walls like stickers. Next morning I sprinkled the room good with holy water."

"Everybody else is lost in New York, it seems to me," said Frank. "New York has too many people."

"It has, it has. We're looking in one another's windows and tramping on one another's necks," agreed Mrs. O'Hara heartily. "I near stepped into a fat policeman's mouth as he was coming up the subway steps and me going down. 'Good God, woman,' says he, 'is it in me face you'd walk!' . . . 'I might,' says I, 'if you don't keep that mouth shut.' And he busted out laughing. So I've persuaded this one's mother to open a boarding house over the slack period, because Peg wants to go back home. She'll have plenty to do then, God give her the stren'th."

"And I'm going home, back to Coaltown," chipped in Peg firmly. "That swat I got this night showed me, though I knew it before, I don't belong in New York. That driver might be excused for not seeing me, but surely to God, he could see that umbrella. The one rib was like a lightning-rod. Gosh, I miss the girls and boys. You can't make up with them down

here as we do up home; you'd hardly pick up two friends in ten years."

"Darling, and belike one out of them two wouldn't be safe for a girl like yourself," warned her aunt, looking anxiously at all that fresh beauty.

A sudden thought came to Frank. Mrs. O'Hara's sister, Peg's mother, was surely something like this whole-souled woman, and such people one couldn't help loving. They were his own clan after all, and how he yearned to be one of them! Perhaps! He began to talk and outlined his soldier's service and his career —*part* of it. There was always work to be had around the anthracite mines, and that was the job he knew best. Since Peg was going back to Coaltown, could he go too and live up there?

"Why *not?*" said Peg very crisply. "You'll be a fine boarder for my mother. Maybe she'll start with you."

"No, she's got two already; ladies," amended the aunt. "One goes from me, Sara Barry, who's had a room here for a long time. She does write stories for the magazines and has did a fine novel. She wants to get out of New York for a while—oh, she'll come back, if she don't get married up there; all the New

Yorkers do—but she wants to get outside stuff and what she calls location colors or something. Then she knows a nurse in Philadelphia who tended her when she had the flu, a Violet McDannell, and the nurse's going up to Maggie's too. So there's three of you to start the boarding house."

Frank liked the way Peg had spoken. It was so warm-hearted. "That would be splendid," he answered, full of enthusiasm, "indeed it would. I'd stop drifting and have something like a home, and believe me, a soldier appreciates that."

"So do we all," supplemented Peg, her eyes growing a little misty. "We never know what home means till we go away from it. I'm split in fifteen pieces tonight with longing for Coaltown. There's a breaker just across from our house and three rows of homes, not counting four other houses up on the mountainside."

"Have you a—a theatre?"

"No," said Peg encouragingly, "but there's one at Mine Run, and good shows often come there; companies that stay a whole week, and do new pieces every afternoon and night; not like the Bronx Opera House, where the same show stays on a whole week."

"Down town on Broadway," added Mrs. O'Hara, "the same show stays on a whole year —if the police doesn't stop it."

"We see beautiful things," went on Peg, "like *Human Hearts* and *She Couldn't Marry Three, Lady Windmeyer's Fan* and *Madame X*, and they do have vaudeville and pictures every night. Of course, some of those actors have been coming and coming every year; belike some of them before I was born. I can remember Cecil Spooner since I was that high."

"Do you like the—*actors?*" asked Frank rather timidly.

"Some of them I'm crazy about, like Eugene O'Brien in *Steve*. Not always the leaders; they're sometimes too old for the parts they do. There's one big fellow, and I don't think he should be an actor at all, though he never skips a line, but he doesn't look a hero. Big ears, big nose, awful clumsy feet, and he's fifty if he's a day, and a husky kind of voice on him. It's his company, you see, so he always does the leading rôles. In *Madame X* I thought he'd play her husband, but he didn't; he was the eighteen-year-old son. And ugly! She ran away in the first act from her baby in the crib, and if he was that son, he was certainly a homely baby.

No wonder the poor woman fell into temptation and got away from that child. She died in the last act after she took a good look at him."

Frank laughed at that sally, but Mrs. O'Hara shook a chiding head: "A mother won't never desert her child, no matter if he looks like a picked rooster or a baby elephant. He's always a beauty to her if to nobody else. Madame X did wrong evidently. Those that die in the plays always does wrong."

Frank thinking of Barney Kennedy and his wife and mother-in-law, commented:

"And in real life the good die or get themselves arrested, while the wicked prosper."

"For a while," corrected Mrs. O'Hara seriously.

Before the ex-soldier bade the ladies good night, it was agreed that he should return the end of the week, and he and Peg would ferry over to Jersey, there to catch the train for the coal regions. She was done with New York. Frank went back to his room, feeling he'd found friends, and he, thank God, was done with New York too.

CHAPTER IV

THE Cleary boarding house at Coaltown was a *howling* success. Surely there were disputes a-plenty among the five lodgers, but never to date a real fight, so good-natured Andy Cleary considered that his wife made a wise move in throwing open their big house to strangers. Whether it was the height of folly or otherwise, Andy knew better than to argue the point with his better half, Maggie herself. Ah, she had a way with her. Maggie and Peg, her daughter, were strong, healthy women, and as both admitted, the extra work just kept them in fine trim.

"I read of a fat opry singer that flung herself all over the stage to rejuice," said Maggie in high feather, "and once she fell into the footlights and broke fifteen."

"Why didn't she try falling downstairs?" twitted Andy.

Maggie had done that herself a month past, and she gave Andy a cold look. "Would I

have fell, had you kept your sneaky old gumshoes off the steps?"

Andy had inherited from his uncle this big house built on ground leased from the coal company, and when Andy married he brought his then slim, now excessively buxom wife proudly into his castle. He'd hoped and so had she, that in time there'd be a regiment of young Clearys to fill every one of the rooms. But Maggie'd had bad luck; she was always falling over her own two feet—and Peg was their only child. Musha, the pair of them went into a decline while Peg was away in New York. Andy was off his feed and tobacco, and Maggie herself lost four pounds. Andy said he did miss them, for they were all below her chin.

"Keep on with that nagging at me neck," threatened Maggie, "and I'll off with me to a beauty doctor and have me face lifted and send you the bill."

"Belike you'd better have your face removed entirely."

Then Maggie furiously plucked to her the evening paper which she'd already gone through, and Andy was punished by an hour's unholy silence.

The men were all working today in the pits,

and the two lady boarders were out taking the mountain air, so Maggie and her beautiful daughter sat mending clothes in the maternal bedroom and discussing kindly enough the foibles of their new-found friends. Not a mite of malice in their talk, of course, but not for the world would Maggie want the strangers to tune in on their conversation. Women have to talk about something and that usually means somebody.

"That Violet McDannell," said Maggie—"gosh, this needle do have a fine hole to it; you thread it, Peg darling. She's a nurse, but 'twouldn't be me would want her over me sickbed. God pity the poor skinny creature, how one can be that thin and live is beyond me senses. The wind could whistle through her ribs like them latticed shutters. I'd feel like getting up and putting that nurse between the sheets, I would."

"For a nurse, mother, she's the queer one. She's afraid of catching this or getting that. Doesn't she know enough to escape sicknesses?"

"Old maids are always that way till they ketch a man."

"For her own sake then, she'd better soon

catch one. She looks as if she didn't love the world and knew the world didn't love her."

"It's true. She grunts her diegestion is went back on her. It's really better in the long run to have a good stomach nor a good head. If you're igrunt, you mayn't never find it out, but who don't know when they have the cramps? Now Sara Barry is luckier; a fat creature good-hearted enough to kiss a goat between the horns, though she's not thin enough to do that. Sara looks as if she'd mothered a big family of children; Violet as if she never would."

"Maybe Sara mothers all those people she puts into her stories. It must be grand to have children right out of your own head."

"The natural way do be far betterer," counseled Maggie. "But I agree with you partial. Sara's big enough to mother a whole city. Poor Violet ain't higher nor a young duck, and she seems always to be looking for worms or bugs. She's what your father calls a bitter pill of a woman, and who loves pills?"

"Mother, poor Violet's no young duck nor chicken either. She pretends she's younger than Sara Barry, but I'd vote them about the same age and safely on in the thirties. What weight Violet lost if she ever had it, Sara's put

on. Gracious, what a tall, big, strong woman she is, and she's always writing about dainty little flappers and slim young men. But Sara's certainly the best educated in our crowd."

"Frank Snow can talk as good as her."

"Yes, but Frank's not well educated. How could he be? He's always had to work for his living since he was a little boy. He's read and read like me; that's all; only he's read better books; even poetry. We who are dumb-bells remember what we read. Sara might start in and give us all night school. She sings well."

"I thought she was elegant last Sunday at Mass when she sang that *Salver Reginer.*"

"Violet declared she was off and got flat three times."

"Oh, that one might say things about the priest himself."

"She did; she said the missionary that preached was a paradox."

"A what?" Maggie's mild eyes registered shock. "A parrot! And him speaking straight from the heart without no word of preparation."

"She didn't mean it that way. You know he was a young Capuchin monk, and Violet sees everything. He was in his bare feet in sandals,

wore the Franciscan habit and an ancient beard and a right up to date hair cut. Musha, the clippers had been put on the back of his head and around his ears. Monks are supposed to be tonsured on the top of the head, not on the back of the neck, said Violet."

"I'd have told herself that old maids with mustaches might be tonsured on the hair lip. One thing we're lucky in. We've all Catholics under this roof, and don't have no religious disputings, except on other matters. I don't think I could abide to hear one declaring the Pope ain't impeachable and another asking who's the priest's wife or is he a widow man and was his father a priest. Religious objections ain't fit for neighbors to delooge one another; I'd sooner get caught in the rain. Though we're not all Catholics at Coaltown, God's good; we ain't got an ioter of bigotness in none of us. We're real neighbors, and why can't neighbors worship God as they see fit without no crucifying? One crucifixion was enough to save us all, wasn't it? And that was Hobrew."

"The few so-called Protestants we have here don't hurt themselves going three miles to church as we do, unless there's a funeral, and

then all churches look alike to them. I don't see how anybody could ever stay away from church so much and be contented in their mind. But maybe their preachers don't preach right; they all say they're too long-winded."

Maggie looked at her sharply. "You've been reading about that book that Louis Sinclair wrote of the preachers, I think?"

"It's all in the papers, mother, and I think that writer played a low, mean trick."

"He did, he did! To eat, drink and be merry in a poor preacher's house, and God knows the poor preachers don't get too much for themselves; to sit with the preacher's wife and nurse the children, and then up and pizen them with words! Ain't enough people staying out of the churches and forgetting how to pray to God without that fool—oh, ain't his picture ugly as sin! With two horns in his forehead, he couldn't look more like the divil, and in red tights with a feather, he'd do for Mephistofeller we seen in the play. But you, Peg!" Maggie held up her needle as if it were a warning digit, "Whatever you do, don't never bring in to me no husband that ain't like yourself and of the same creed. I'd forgive you anything else. I hate mixing up religions."

"Mother, what do you think I am? Are you expecting I'd lug home to you a hard-shell Baptist or a soft-shell Salvation Army captain?"

"The Salvation Army man in Righter's Tunnel is a handsome feller, and his clothes do set him off grand; they fit so tight around the hips, and I have saw you talking to him."

"You saw me giving him my last quarter, for he's feeding all the bums in the country."

"I respect him for that meself. Even bums have a right to eat; didn't God put mouths on 'em? The least the world can give any of us is a bite to live on. I'd sooner be burnt by the Indians nor to be gnawed of the hunger."

"After seeing you and dad, how could I ever marry a man that wasn't a Catholic?"

"You have wisdom there, me girl. The Church is wise in clinching men fast to their wives and vizza verza, and it's safe and blessed for the women, and human nature do need something higher nor itself. But even all the Catholics ain't like your king of a father—but don't ever let him know I think it, or he'd get putting on airs to himself, like the turkey gobbler that would sooner strut around nor eat, imagining himself a peacock, the ugly beast.

And I'd have to call Andy's royal highness down a peg or two. Men are the divil anyhow; now you have them and now they have you. Only God could have made the male of the speeches, and I think He thought long and sore before He done it. Us poor women are but candles in their hands, and they light us up, and we sink down in our own grease if we ain't watching out. And being a woman I mistrust the frailness of me own sect. And these days with the movies and the novels and the books again the preachers and the newspapers and the women with nothing on their bodies till even the near-sighted old Pope notices the hussies, is it any wonder me heart is untrustworthy? A mother now ain't surprised if her daughter comes home to her married to a kangaroo."

"Let your heart be at peace on my score, mother; I won't ever. I want a man who'll get on his knees and say his prayers beside me and say prayers like mine. I'll teach babies their prayers, but I wouldn't want to teach a man."

"Well, not that I'm speeding you up, don't you think it's about time you got him on his knees? You're getting old."

"Yes, I'm not far from twenty."

"I was your mother at nineteen. And here we have three unmarried young men under the roof. You pick your own choice."

"Also two unmarried ladies, mind!"

"Oh, you'd win again that pair at any time. But we've enough single men for the whole three ladies. The men are at *your* mercy. Don't *you* feed 'em, make their beds soft and neat and darn their clothes?"

"I feel like doing something stronger than *darn* when I patch and re-patch the underwear of our stingy Dutchman, Nicholas Dobberstein."

"Ain't he just the opposite of Raymond Sloupsky, our Polander! Raymond is that conceited—and extravagant," she gave the girl a "Look out!" glance, "he won't wear a shirt as soon as the cuffs begin to fray. Nicholas would be a safer husband."

"Mother, does a girl think about safety in a husband? Isn't it the man always, not his odd little ways, which we all have?"

The two women stopped sewing and looked intently into each other's eyes. They both had the same unvoiced thought.

"Peg, you're in love with Frank Snow."

"You might be yourself if he saved you

from an auto in New York and brought you home and got you your dinner on the train—the first time I ever dined in a car—and you in a new dress and coat and hat he bought. Why, he wouldn't take a cent, even when that chauffeur paid me one hundred dollars. 'For the shock,' said the judge, but the hundred dollars was the biggest and best shock I ever experienced."

"Don't worry about what you owed Frank. I've made it all up to him in his board and clothes in me own underhand way, but," here Maggie wagged her head sagely, "you don't love him for them things; you love him for himself."

"I know it, but he doesn't. But I do know he isn't in love with me."

"How *do* you know it? With those two virgin matrons of ours you certainly show up fine, and look like a schoolgirl in their classes; the one to show you how to get sick; the other how to get in wrong in print and then get in right again. Frank seems to be afraid of women. A girl can cure that."

"He's a wonderful boy, mother, and here's hoping I'll effect the cure."

"Well, if you don't, don't break your heart

about it. The way Nicholas Dobberstein sets back and eyes your red hair, and the hungry look Raymond Sloupsky gives you, you can land either of 'em. They're American enough in spite of their nationality, for weren't they both born in Pennsylvania? But it's the way of things: Frank may up and fall for one of them withered dames, the big armful of cabbage or the wizened fishbone."

"Oh, mother, if I thought he would, I'd pitch myself madly to save him. Violet will expect a man to nurse her, and the more he nurses her, the more aches she'll acquire. Sara is so busy correcting everybody in points of etiquette and good grammar that when she gets her first proposal—I know she's never had one yet—when the man speaks the momentous words, she'll shudder and babble, 'Oh, for heaven's sake, don't say *ain't.*"

"You get out with Frank more. He sticks too close to the house and the men at cards. You might go down oftener to Mine Run with him. I was saying me beads the other night on the back porch in the moonlight, and I heard Frank and them talking about you, and his voice sounded as if he cared. I couldn't catch it all, so I stopped in a Sorrowful Mystery:

'What was that ye were saying?' I spoke up. Your dad bellered: 'Maggie, don't be guilty of listening and eavesdrooping to men's conversation. Go on with your beads.' "

"But I can't ask Frank very well with Raymond, our Polish millionaire, though always broke and borrowing, begging me every night to go with him in his Ford."

"You can run the Ford now yourself," advised Maggie, wrinkling up her eyes cannily, and giving Peg a suggestive look.

The daughter suddenly rocked laughing. "Oh, female of the species! Raymond taught me to run his car; now you want me to kidnap the Irishman in the Polander's chariot. But, mother, it's much more heavenly to walk through the woods down to Mine Run, particularly in the evening when the whippoorwills are in the trees. Coming home from Vespers last Sunday, it was grand to hear them. One farther away sounded like the ghost of the first. Then a darn old cow lying in the bushes gave a moo and destroyed the poetry and scared the life out of me."

"At such times you should do this:" Maggie rolled her eyes 'way up, like a frog giving up the ghost, panted and clutched. "Grab hold on

him. It's a sly way of telling a man you need him." Maggie smiled like the creek in the sunlight. "You're a flappert all right and light of the foot. If you add one hundred pounds like your mother, you won't want to trip like no fairy along a rocky, bushy path with mine breaches and snakes for three miles. But you're like your lean dad, that spirit of famine constitution. Tell me, though, not that I'm curious, but I would like to know, has Frank said e'er a sweet word to you at all?"

"Lots of sweet words, but so far as love goes, none. Once I skidded *purposely* at the edge of one of the breaches when he was close. I grabbed, but he grabbed first. Heavens, he is strong. He held me very close, and when I looked up into his face he was pale with *fright.*"

"Do you think the shell shock came back on him."

Peg laughed again. "Do I look like Big Bertha? Then he stayed farther away from me than ever before."

"A good sign. He likes you, but maybe thinks you wouldn't want him because of the shell shock."

"Oh, that's out of his system by this, or soon

will be, unless Sara brings it back using those French words. She doesn't know Polish, so Raymond is safe. She tried to say Goodby in German, and that slow Dutchman of ours tripped up her heels; she didn't pronounce it right. You don't hear her batting German words around any more, anyhow not when Nicholas is listening."

"Oh, the poor creature, it's bad for a woman to be so bright. With her clickety tongue she do make me think of that typesetter she uses. Ain't it mir'culous the way I keep peace under this roof! Violet grunting that the typesetter gets on her nerves. Sara saying that Violet don't eat enough vita-something to build her up. Raymond wanting red beef soup, Nicholas sauerkraut——"

"And, mother, think of it, Frank, taking gladly just anything he gets and thanking us all over the place. Oh, to have such a husband!"

"You see, daughter, he was a soldier. And God forgive the country! how soon them and their sacrifices is forgot! We were all blinding ourselves knitting sweaters and socks that didn't fit them when they went to be cannon fooder. Now we don't care if they ain't got no pants."

Maggie, looking out, spied her brace of ladies returning. the expansive Sara and the attenuated Violet, so she hurried down to prepare a tray of tea and toast. The city ladies were soon nibbling and sipping and gossiping in the improvised sewing-bedroom. Of course, that prevented Maggie and her daughter following any further the heart trail that might lead to the hearth.

Both the elderly virgins were quite content, more than content here in the mountains at Coaltown, but neither seemed to wish the other to know that. Perhaps Sara was hoping Violet would leave and vice versa. Women are oftener jealous of one another than men are. Yet the nurse and the novelist didn't openly quarrel, though by times they came close to the danger zone.

"I sold one of my stories to the movies today," vouchsafed the tall and well-set Sara. "I rather thought the screen would take it; it's such a ripping love story. Nothing half so sweet in life as love's young——"

"Tripe!" interjected Violet sourly.

Peg studied the romance builder and decided that creator looked more like a bridge-builder.

"Ah, love," said Maggie, "we love it everywhere, in the books and in the fillums."

"Yes, the *films,*" Sara hit that word with her fist, "couldn't be successful without it." She glanced at her boarding mistress to note did herself catch the correction. Peg did, whatever about her mother.

"Love do make the world go round," completed the placid housewife.

"It *does,*" amended Sara.

"If love is on the square," put in Violet. She arrowed a sharp look at Sara; why try to disturb Maggie Cleary? Wasn't her English good enough for all purposes, and was there ever a better cook and more affable landlady? "Because of love not properly applied, either by the lovers or the people who write them," the nurse was slightly venomous now, "we have the censors to cut the pictures for us."

"Why do they do it?" asked Maggie indignantly. "Ain't love the very gizzards of life?" A shudder ran the length of Sara's long well-fleshed spine. "Every woman—" she caught herself quickly, did Maggie, and was nervous, "every man, I mean, should be married before the early twenties."

"They would be better off," agreed Sara very quickly.

"So would the women," added Peg without diplomacy.

"How?" queried Violet sharply.

"It's much easier, I imagine, to train a young husband than an old one."

"How clever you can be, Peg!" acclaimed Violet.

"How clever she *is,* I say," corrected Sara, taking the largest slice of toast.

"And yet *you* never were at a lady's *finishing* college and don't write romances," went on Violet.

"No, nor she won't never be. She can send her son to college if she likes," said Maggie. "And I'd rather live a romance nor never write none."

"Negatives!" hissed Sara under her breath in the tone in which Betsey Trotwood said, "Donkeys!" They all heard Sara, though Peg and Maggie didn't understand. "I do suppose, Mrs. Cleary, all women dream of their possible sons."

"Or their impossible ones," chipped in Violet.

Peg tittered, and Sara gave Violet a look of

reproof, a teacher's aloof, haughty glance. "I suppose it is all right for us *girls* to be talking of our possible or impossible future sons before Peg, who's a mere child, since Mrs. Cleary's here as chaperon."

"Whatever I'm supposed to be, I'd sooner see Peg's sons nor to talk of 'em," said that candid, gracious dame. "And she ain't no child no longer no more."

"Heaven!" hissed Sara to herself again, and Violet understood she referred to the negatives that Maggie strewed about with such prodigality. "I note," Sara adopted a coyness of manner, "that Raymond Sloupsky is very attentive to Peg."

"Not a bit more so than Nicholas Dobberstein," parried the girl.

"Oh, but Raymond talks to you more, though he includes the rest of us," said Violet, "while Nicholas just stares and stares at you."

"And excludes the rest of us," concluded Sara. "I'd say both boys have the symptoms."

Peg noted that both ladies subtly avoided the subject of Mr. Snow, yet she sensed he was the closest to the hearts of all three. "What do both of you girls think of Frank?" she asked point-blank, with a striking likeness to her

mother. There was a little pause of embarrassment, while Violet crammed too much toast into her mouth and Sara drank a too big mouthful of tea and gagged. "I'll answer," finished Peg. "I think we're all in love with *him—*" Maggie frowned at her—"even my mother is."

"Who wouldn't be," replied Maggie, pleased in a moment, "the lonesome, poor lost creature he seems by times? And him but a boy too."

"To me," said Violet, "Nicholas Dobberstein looks now and then far more woebegone."

"But Frank went through the war," defended Peg.

"Poor Nicholas looks as if he did," returned the nurse, "and fought on both sides. When he got through cleaning out the Yanks, then he went after the Germans, and between both barrages poor Nicholas wilted."

"I can't joke about the war, not since I've talked to Frank," added Peg wistfully.

"Oh, I guess he won it," remarked Violet spitefully, for she was secretly jealous of the soldier's preference for the colleen. " 'The story of a wounded man is painted from his

own wounds—always a red tale of disaster,' " she quoted.

"What an odd quotation!" threw in Sara.

"I don't quite understand what Violet means," admitted Peg, "but I know Frank hasn't told the tenth of what he went through. He's keeping something perfectly terrible back. I've drawn him out at times and got a bit of it, but only a bit. When the shrapnel hit him in the side"—Sara's near-sighted eyes were now full of sympathy, but Violet's were more frosty—"Frank fell down in the mud and might have bled to death. A fat, fierce rat crept up to him, and those were the first eyes Frank looked into when he came out of his swoon. That creature sniffing at his face! The horrible thing sat there on its haunches, its paws scraping its whiskers, waiting for the half dead man to give it dead food."

"Oh, my God!" cried Sara, clasping her large ink-stained hands. She was always making notes with her leaky fountain pen, and her right fingers were never without smudges. With one of those fingers she wiped tears out of her eyes.

Then Maggie tossed the sewing on her bed,

and hurried down to get busy at the supper preparations against the men's return from the mines. She forgot about the shirt on the bed with the big needle sticking in it.

Andy went up early having a headache from the bad air; the mine fan hadn't been working well, or anyhow its waves of ether didn't reach to the high-up hole where Andy was burrowing. "Oh, God's good; I'm safe in me own home," said he, undressing in the dark, and then he sat down on the mended shirt.

A week before lightning had hit the big manure pile at the mule stable and scattered the foulness in every direction. Andy was a typical miner with the black diamond vocabulary. It came spattering down into the sitting room, where Sara was reading aloud love passages from her newest masterpiece. Maggie, who was rapt by the narrative, fled to close the stair door and fell sprawling over the rug. When she got herself up, Peg had the door already shut, and Andy was silenced so far as they were concerned.

"Awful!" shuddered Violet.

"It must be a great relief, just the same," corrected the broad-minded Sara. "I often

envy men their privileges. It's really terrible to be a woman at times."

"Andy will find it's terrible to be a man this night," threatened Maggie with thunder in her tones. "And him in the Holy Name Society too."

"Oh, well, mother," pleaded Peg, "it was only bad words, wasn't it? no cursing at all. Dad would die before he'd ever use the Holy Name, and you know it."

"Peg's a splendid casuist," said Sara.

"Oh, God forbid she is," exclaimed Maggie. "Do that mean a heretic?"

CHAPTER V

One of Peg's duties was to carry drinking water from the spring up on the hill, also to keep the barrels filled with wash water from the horse trough which was near the gate. It was the same water with a difference; purer and colder up there where it bubbled out of the mountainside, yet still fairly clean when it reached the spout that spurted into the long box for the animals. Pretty little lizards and a few small fish and a great many frogs were holding their April parties among their own friends.

Peg was thoughtful, very thoughtful this evening as she went with her two tin buckets along the jagged path. This glorious spring was having its effect on her, as it would naturally on any normal girl. It's not only the young man's fancy that turns to thoughts of mating when the bluebirds return. The fireflies were hunting up one another with their little lanterns. They looked like miners with their tiny lamps. She thought of the days when

the women worked in the coal pits with the men in England.

The woods that had been such ragged beggars sunning all winter, now were queening it in royal green. Nature was singing a wedding song, a "come-all-ye" to youthful hearts. The black ugliness of the breaker and the creek from the colliery was veiled in twilight poetry. Over there in the ebony watery culm where this brook emptied, two gold-heeled fairies raced—the visible echo of an automobile's lamps.

Peg had "it" bad, so had her father.

Andy, who never beat about the bush, had talked to her wit'out putting a tooth in it, which showed that Raymond Sloupsky had been talking to him. The boy owned that innate Polish tender regard for parents, and he revealed to Andy Cleary his love for the luscious Peg before he asked her for her hand. That the lad had won favor at headquarters was evident. Peg didn't know just what to think about it, but love the worthy young Pole she did not. *Did* she love anybody else? She was afraid to answer that question honestly for herself.

At the spring was a young man sitting

thinking of Peg, but she hadn't seen him yet, though she soon would. The evening was a bit chilly for April, and she now wore a little white shawl about her shoulders. All winter she'd run to the gate to meet Frank Snow. If the weather was particularly cold that small woolen shawl did service about her head, and he was pondering now that with her pink face and red-brown head and the white covering she was like a roasted apple with cracked brown skin and snowy pulp in a dish of cream.

But wasn't it an apple that upset the world?

Peg broke in on his reverie and asked him what were his thoughts, that he should look like a humpback philosopher. He smiled easily every time he glanced at her, and so he told her.

"A baked apple!" she laughed sweetly. "So I'm a kind of dessert, and our special dish for Sundays."

"There is something, a whole lot of Sunday about you, Peg."

She swung her bucket under the spout of bark, and laughed up into his earnest dark eyes which were taking a survey of her small red-brown head, big sparkling blue eyes and healthy, sweet face. Peg met his gaze frankly,

innocently. She didn't mind being "weighed up" in this fashion. Her bright glance noted how thick his dark hair was. Such hair! she longed to run her fingers through it as she was wont to do with her father's gray-streaked thatch; only the boy's would have looked like a field of grain wind-tossed, while Andy's looked like huckleberry bushes after a forest fire. How honest his eyes were! If only they weren't so terribly sad! What character in that forehead and brain too, matching the strength in the jaw and chin and wide shoulders!

Peg was thinking just the thoughts poor little nurse Teenie Cope thought when she had the soldier in her charge; only Teenie used to wash that face and brush that hair back from his forehead. Teenie even shaved him with the safety razor and massaged his firm cheeks with her vanishing cream. Peg would have done as much, had good luck given her the opportunity.

"There's something holy, a halo, about women like you, Peg, and they make men think of Sunday."

"Sunday's when poor miners rest."

"That's it; we rest our body and soul, and a woman like you is like that; a soothing syrup

to a big baby of a man who's just tired to death, body and soul, just clean tuckered out."

"The mines must be awful hard to work in," replied Peg pityingly.

"No, not when you're used to 'em. I'd sooner work under the ground than above it; an even temperature, you see. Storms never hit you in the mines."

"But the roof might."

"Most miners don't get killed or even hurt. No, it's not the work," and he sighed. "And when a miner leaves the mines, he always wishes to go back."

"It's that war you have on your mind," she said, settling herself comfortably down on the moss near his feet where she could look up into his face. "Maybe if you'd talk about it, it might help you to get it off your chest. When I'm worried, I can always talk the whole thing away. My grandmother has had enough trouble for six women. Her husband was killed in the mines. She married again, for she had a houseful of children, and within the year that husband was crushed by a fall of top rock. He lived a helpless cripple with a broken spine for two years, and she waited on him hand and foot to the end. She gave up marriage as a

hopeless failure and concentrated on her motherhood. Then her oldest son was smothered by black damp and her youngest was burnt to a crisp by mine gas. But she's survived it all. She talks, talks, talks, and doesn't allow poison to accumulate in her system."

"It's queer that I can't talk to any of the fellows about the war, but I can talk to you. Why?" And he laughed, showing his fine teeth.

"Because I'm a woman, and my heart's aching over every boy that went through with it, whether he was American or German. Like all the rest of my sex, I'm flat-footedly against war. I saw that movie of Nazimova, *War Brides,* and I agreed that there should be no more war."

"It seems, though, one of the necessary evils."

"I suppose, Frank, women aren't as wise as you men."

"I wonder about that, Peg. Are men very wise? I'm not."

They talked about the war till the moon was high, then Frank carried her buckets for her to the house. Raymond Sloupsky's yellow moon face clouded when he saw them, and he

shot the handsome ex-soldier what is popularly known as a dirty look. Raymond under his breath muttered a few words that were in no dictionary, esoteric or exoteric. He never could relieve his feelings in English, whether he prayed or swore. It took his father's tongue to turn the trick. Raymond was remarkably clean of profanity in English; he didn't vote it much of a sin to cut loose in Polish. It was like Fee-fa-fum! or Raw-head and bloody bones!

"I bet you, Frank, you didn't have no better cooks in the army nor I wished on you here," said Andy Cleary at supper.

The master of the house looked with satisfaction at the substantial meal to which Sara Barry was doing more than justice, while the languid Violet McDannell picked meticulously. To be sure, the cloth was darned here and there by Peg's deft fingers, but was spotless from her washboard. Maggie's cheery face beamed and Peg's apple blossom countenance radiated. Everybody was happy except young Raymond, though Nicholas Dobberstein could hardly be voted a sunbeam. The big German boarder was more in the class of a reserved moonbeam that had seen somebody murdered and didn't want to tell about it.

"For heaven's sake, Andy, don't talk about army cooks and destroy my appetite entirely," laughed Frank. "But the boys did their best, which was the worst imaginable."

"You poor things!" sighed Sara, scooping up a well buttered baked potato.

"Ah, the tragedy of war!" cackled Violet shrilly.

"Long before the war, though, I was a terrible cook myself," confessed Frank. "You see I never really had a home at all; like Topsy, I was found under a cabbage and grew like a rabbit on the hop, skip and jump."

"However, you've grown beautifully," said Sara with a kindly smirk, diving into the boiled cabbage.

"And don't men make the homes for themselves?" queried the arch Violet. Peg opined the two brazen old hussies should have been slapped.

"No, it's the women who make the homes for the men, as Andy here knows," returned Frank earnestly. "Another fellow like myself, a floater, and I were baching together. We had some home of it. He had to mend the clothes; I did the cooking. A tomato plant——"

"That is called the love-apple," advised Sara the literary.

"That isn't what I'd call it," replied Frank grimly. "A tomato growing innocent in the garden gives me the feeling a bull gets when he sees a Soviet. If my orbs light on a tomato can, so does my foot. I crush that carrier of torture out of all shape and form. You see we ate so many canned tomatoes. Easiest thing to prepare. The bill of fare was for breakfast a can of tomatoes slopped into a pan, one fistful of flour and let stew while we both smoked and played cards. The flour floated about in white lumps like good souls swimming in a scarlet sea of sin."

"Rhetoric excellent," approved Sara, munching a pickled onion.

"But, Sara, the tomatoes didn't taste excellent. Those lumps would never cook clear through, and you always got the taste of dry flour like tooth powder. Dinner a can of tomatoes again. Supper we ate the remains of the tomato stew left from dinner, and if that was small, we opened a fresh can, and had cold tomatoes for dessert, laying away what was left for the morning. For variety, our menu was drawn up thusly: tomats for breakfast, for

then both of us were grouchy; tomaters for dinner, for then we were coming to normal, and tomautoes for supper, because then they were dessert, and we were feeling classy."

"By this and that," said Peg, "I'll cook tomatoes for you no more forever."

"Cook 'em all for me," chipped in Raymond. He glanced at Frank to indicate he'd scored one on his rival.

"But don't forget me," begged Nicholas Dobberstein.

"Oh, but tomatoes are different when *you* cook them, Peg," replied Frank gallantly.

Raymond either said something in Polish or swallowed a too big mouthful. The tomcat at his hip seemed to understand and whisked under the stove.

"Our bed was a lot of straw in a sacking," went on Frank.

"A donkey's breakfast," Maggie shuddered.

"One night our bed broke down in the middle, and my chum and I slept with a gulf between us. He was up on one bank, I hugged the other." Sara was keenly alert; good story about bachelors. "We were like England and Ireland glaring across the sea at each other. I wanted him to fix it, and he was waiting for

me. Then I dozed off and woke up when I fell down into the hole. I'd just got myself out when he rolled in. Then we both tumbled in together. I was woozy with sleep and bellowed: 'Give me half of this bed, or I'll tear up the sheets!' He was wide-awake and splitting laughing: 'I'll give you the *hole* of it.' So we both finally got up and repaired the broken laths."

"Eat, eat, boy," chided Maggie herself, pushing the dish of potatoes toward him, "eat before your things get cold. Eat as long as it's cooked; there's plenty more on the back of the stove."

The meal over, Andy and Frank sat in the kitchen where Peg was washing up the dishes, while the others were in the sitting room. There was a contented little silence while Peg swished and slashed. Outside the rising wind snorted and sniffled around the windows like a beast seeking admission. Behind the stove hung the men's working clothes arranged in order to dry out, for some of them had been wet, nothing unusual, and on the oilcloth directly beneath rested their black brogans. Peg turned swiftly. Those smocks were too close to the stove; she could smell them, she said; they had the odor

of dynamite; so she took them down and laid them carefully across the backs of chairs.

"Gosh, isn't it nice to sit in a woman's kitchen!" said Frank complacently with his feet wide apart. He looked approvingly around; at the two kegs of coal behind the stove, the shoe box, the sleepy square-headed, battle-scarred tomcat lying asleep—at Peg so close to him. "Andy, this sure is home, the best home I ever struck, and don't you fear I'm not appreciating it."

In the next room Sara smote the rather tinny piano and let forth melody, vocal as well as instrumental. She seemed full of the joy of life and wanted everbody to know it and share it. What she couldn't write out of herself in pleasant stories, she sang out. She was rendering *In the Gloaming,* and Peg was watching Frank out of the tail of her eye as Sara's contralto pleaded:

"When the winds are sobbing faintly with a gentle, unknown woe,
Will you think of me and love me, as you did once long ago?"

She noticed him bite his lips hard. Had he loved somebody "once long ago"?

Violet entered like a wisp of discontent. Into the cozy kitchen she came as fog would through a crack. "Men's voices please me better," she said, taking a chair near Frank.

Everything had been so pleasant and confidential that Peg yearned to raise the meat platter and crash it down on Violet's painfully arranged tresses. Then the sounds of a flivver smote louder than the wind outside or the piano inside; the old gate creaked on its hinges, and in galloped the Polish sheik, his face smooth from a talcum rub. But he'd forgotten his nose, or the wind blew the powder off. The nose glistened like a third eye in his face. In that hour Raymond was resplendent enough to woo the daughter of Captain Pilsudski. The sheik was garbed as to the chest in a changeable silk shirt on which a chameleon would have burst himself, trying to be fifty-seven colors at once; white tie with black dots that said "Seven; come eleven!" pink socks with frail vines to indicate where his ankles were—as if that were necessary; feet in tan low shoes made more conspicuous than even too prodigal mother nature fashioned them; salt and pepper suit. A heliotrope handker-

chief peeked out from the pocket above his heart. He looked not unlike a very substantial young ham, be-cloved and be-garnished for a wedding breakfast.

He superciliously ignored Frank and approached the dish washer. "Peg, there's a peach of a fillum at Mine Run tonight."

"Maybe I saw it before," equivocated the disgruntled beauty. She was tempted to pitch Violet at Raymond.

"Do you see that many?" chided her father, peeved at her air.

"Anyhow isn't it going to rain by the looks of it?" she added.

"Ain't Raymond's car got windy curtains, girl?" demanded Andy, seeming a very majestic king—an air he sometimes put on with Peg when his wife was absent.

"And I'm not through with my work and not dressed."

"Maggie-ee!" ordered the king. He was the nominal head of this house, and he could show his daughter that. The real head of the house came into the kitchen at the summons. Peg knew the jig was up and let her cloth fall into the suds. She'd never disobeyed her father in

her life whatever about her mother. "Raymond wants to take Peg to the movies; says there's a good one."

"I think they're all good meself," replied the plump matron, putting her hand to the pots, "though you never took me to none in my day."

"But what about since?" laughed Andy. "And what about the picnics, when we had our pictures took on tintypes? Of course, you've forgot the time we stole the ham bone and went off to a nook with that."

"Don't make a relic jug of yourself, Andy," counseled Maggie. "That ham bone is phosphorous by this."

The furious Peg, a flash of blue and white calico, was gone from the kitchen. Maggie studied Frank a little and noticed he was biting his lips and his lids were lowering. Raymond, very chesty with broad hands spread on the evident silk shirt, strutted around victoriously, as if he wanted to flap wings and crow. Violet gazed not without admiration on that young husky who was passably good-looking in a rough virile way, though he owned a cheesy complexion. She wondered if he'd kiss Peg on the road. A swift malice seized and carried away the bilious nurse.

"What's the name of the picture, Raymond?" she asked suggestively.

"I—I just forget," he temporized. Two was company; he understood Violet and her purpose.

He'd been taught by that hideous object lesson of last week. He had himself and Peg slated for a dance at Righter's Tunnel, and Sara Barry horned in on that pleasure trip. When the novelist scattered her embonpoint all over the little runabout, there was scarcely room left for the driver. Peg with repressed laughter darted back into the house, saying she was crowded out, and he'd better take Sara only. He had to grin (though that isn't what he did under his breath!) and bear it.

Then at the dance, of course, he couldn't let his companion sit in the corner all evening collecting vicarious thrills to hand on to her readers. He danced with her, though he'd have preferred an egg-shaped little Slovak virgin who sold hot dogs and pickles. Sara! why, he'd just as soon have whirled the big feather bed that had lost its wheels. The orchestra sat huddled up in the corner, being more and more in the road as the evening waxed and the couples multiplied. Squire Levi Krepps was the cap-

tain of that valiant band, and the majestic squire, with a big strip of widower's black on his sleeve, beat sorrow out of the bass-drum. Squire Levi's eye, more appreciative than Raymond's, viewed the tall and heroic Sara, and he forthwith missed a beat on the drum.

When that lady's orbs met the squire's, Raymond had the suspicion her heart also missed a beat. Anyhow she lost interest in the young Pole and more or less archly concentrated on the middle-aged German drummer-boy. Yes, positively the cold and formal squire acted like a juvenile, smiling up at Sara, and giving the drum an encouraging wallop every time she swung into his ken. And Raymond noticed that she manipulated his steps in such a way that she was never far from the orchestra corner. None of that circling the whole room for Sara. She was like a wise soldier who aims at a small objective.

Not that the squire was small. He wasn't what you could call a tall man, but what he lacked in height he compensated for in girth at the chest and waist line. He had two picnic chairs drawn together and was sitting on them both at once.

Sara growing more and more forgetful of

her partner and her real business on the dance floor, once or twice mounted her not inconsiderable weight on Raymond's insteps. "My mistake," she said heedlessly, and did it again. He was minded to give her a hearty swing and send her flying either on to the big drum or into the squire's lap which was of about the same width. On the road home she was dreamy, and when she spoke at all, asked a variety of questions about Levi Krepps.

Raymond and Peg drove off to Mine Run, and as they did the heavens growled and the rain pelted down as if in disapproval. Sara, who was mortally afraid of lightning, shut the piano and lit a blessed candle, and started in to play cards with Nicholas Dobberstein, who had stood at the window watching till Peg and the Pole were off.

CHAPTER VI

It was late when Raymond and Peg got back and everybody was abed; that is, everybody except Frank Snow. The lamp was turned down low as if he'd been thinking in the twilight, only a thin ray from the window stealing as if in frightened confession out into the darkness. The night was raw as well as wet, and Peg was glad to find the kitchen fire blazing, the coals crackling contentedly, a rich glow from the open doors of the stove. Raymond came in first and looked frostily at the handsome soldier fellow, then waggled his head as if he had water in his ears and rushed off to bed. It was hard enough for Mrs. Cleary to rout him in the morning even when he got eight hours' sleep.

Peg close at his heels removed her coat slowly. When Raymond was gone, she turned to the face uplifted to hers, her radiant eyes like the live coals in the grate, her rosy lips parted. Frank sitting in the embrace of the red light, felt a warm thrill of admiration as he took in her beauty.

"You out of bed yet, you rascal," she twitted softly, spreading her hands over the hot lids. "Won't you feel down and out in the morning for want of sleep?"

"Maybe, but I don't feel a bit sleepy now." He wouldn't admit even to himself that he had sat up waiting for her return.

"I'm not a bit sleepy either, but you go as soon as you're ready." She drew a rocker to the stove, pulled off her rubbers, fluffed her hair a bit and surveyed him closely. The glow of the fire showed that he was unusually thoughtful, if not sad. "The picture was splendid. Frank, may I talk seriously to you? You know you seem so much like a—a brother."

"Oh! Why, yes, say anything you like, Peg, of course."

She lowered her voice and he bent toward her. There was something deliciously secret in this tête-à-tête; just they two sharing a confidence. "Dad is anxious for me to get married."

"He told me he hoped you soon would."

"I don't see why we couldn't come into the world without fathers," she exclaimed pettishly, "as the lizards fall down in the rain. A

father is such a nuisance sometimes; particularly when he wants to marry off his daughter. And I do hope dad didn't say it to you the way he said it to me: 'Peg, I have a cramp in me stomach waiting to see you a bride. If I was in your canoe, I'd either hatch or get off the nest.' Just that! I felt like saying it's not easy to hatch when you're sitting on a doorknob."

No answer came to her from the silent dark face there looking princely in the warm red light.

"The way Nicholas Dobberstein follows me around with his eyes may mean anything or nothing; he's never said a word of love to me. But Raymond has. Tonight he asked me to marry him; told me he'd already spoken to dad, and—and Raymond talks blunt and plain just like dad himself. In fact, that Polack is a bit of a roughneck."

"He's a fine, clean boy, Peg."

"So is Nicholas, Frank, and a century better-looking. Raymond said: 'Your dad has hogged you long enough; kept you all for himself. Polish girls get married young, so why shouldn't you?' "

"And Raymond spoke the truth, Peg; why shouldn't you? Your dad doesn't want to keep

you any longer all to himself. He wants to share his sunshine with a poor boy like Raymond or Nicholas. God knows none of the coal mine boys have any too much sunshine in their lives. Anyhow you'll live right here with your dad, you and your husband."

"Yes, I won't leave them unless, of course, my husband should want that. I'd never be the fool woman to enter marriage without following my man whithersoever he went. But things are going so nice here just as we are; all of us a jolly little crowd. Wouldn't my marriage make a difference? A sort of bringing in Raymond in a new form; making him boss of everybody? It might seem to me like waking up on a snowy cold morning after a dream of spring and new blossoms and singing birds."

"Just the other way around, Peg, if you get the right man."

"If I get the right man! There's the rub. Frank, you must know how Raymond wastes his money; spends it before he gets it; is always in debt. Money makes the mare go, but Raymond's Ford makes the money fly. He borrows here and there, even from you."

"He always pays back."

"But he never has a cent. He won't change. Nicholas saves and saves."

"And never has a cent either."

"I wonder what he does with his money? I put patches and patches on his clothes; yet I know he's not mean and stingy."

"My impression, Peg, is that Nicholas gives his money to somebody else."

"I've imagined that too. Frank, do you think Nicholas loves me?"

"No, Peg, I do not. He admires you, likes you, would do anything for you, but Nicholas is sick about some other woman. That's my hunch. You remind him of somebody else."

"Gosh, Frank, you take the breath out of me with your keen perception."

"Maybe because I'm a man and understand men, while you're a girl. For example, yellow hair on a woman I hate, because it reminds me —no matter."

Peg bit her lip with chagrin: why didn't he go on and tell her? "Anyhow Raymond is now our boarder. To fetch him in as my husband would be like leading a black stranger here into our crowd; our home, your home, my home, dad's home; an outsider set in the place of honor."

"But your husband could never be an outsider to your dad or the rest of us. We'd all give him the inside track at once, and I know your dad's aching to see you settled in marriage."

They sat there in silence for a time, with the wind sobbing around the eaves and in the chimney. Sara, who'd overeaten as usual, vented a shrill scream in her nightmare. At that Peg arose. "Frank, you'd better get to your bed," she said coldly; "you must work tomorrow."

She was standing over the stove, and he heard something splash on the lids. He was leaving the kitchen quietly to go to his room and turned in the doorway. Peg wasn't sure that she was seeing clearly, for the lamp was still low; but she thought she saw the face of a man in mortal anguish, blank, distorted, as soldiers must have looked when the fatal gas crept into their lungs; as they surely looked when the ripping shrapnel tore into a buddy's heart, and a boy's body sank down into the mud and gore, while the stern voice of duty bade the desolate comrade Carry On! Go Forward! Did Frank's face really wear that expression, or was it only her imagination?

In stooping behind the stove to lift a keg

of coal, she brushed her cheek against his flannel working shirt. In fury she pulled the garment from the nail and flung it into the corner, disturbing the dreams of the big tom-cat that had made a bed of two socks. It was the rain that kept Mr. Tom indoors tonight, she knew, or he'd be out caterwauling his *In the Gloaming, O My Darling!* as was his wont. She didn't like cats much, because they were so selfish; out all night, sleep all day. Just like men—animals! You could pet and pamper them, give them of your best, and they didn't give a hoot for you.

The shirt lay outspread like a man with arms extended. Her conscience reproached her. How could she ever think unkindly of Frank Snow? Wasn't it his hands that plucked her from under the auto juggernaut in that hated New York Bronx? How he carried her like a babe in his big bosom, his soft, hot breath beating against her cheek! Didn't he out of his few dollars buy her a new rig, including even a hat, when she was worse than naked in rags? She went over on tiptoe, as if the shirt were a man asleep. Then in the red glow from the stove she caught the hideous resemblance. It was like somebody in agony on the rack!

Oh, my God! had she seen or had she only dreamed that Frank's face was in mortal agony? What if he *did* love her? And tonight she had trifled with his misery, as a well-fed cat would torment a robin to hear it squeak. Yes, Frank's eyes had all the agony of a robin's for which there was no escape; caught, its wings broken; no more sunshine; freedom gone forever, it would cleave the clean, sweet air never again with its mate. She understood his poverty. Surely he must know she didn't mind about being poor. Anyhow what had Raymond Sloupsky and what would he ever have beyond his manhood?

What could money give her better than her robust health and keen enjoyment of the simplest pleasures? Rich women were always losing their valuable jewels in the newspapers, and spending a fortune on detectives to get them back. A real diamond, like the real Charley Ross, had a way of vanishing beyond recall. Hadn't two poor girls been murdered in New York for their paltry gems? What did she care for genuine pearls when one could get such pretty imitations cheaply? And wasn't it better for a woman to be real and let only her gewgaws be spurious? If the light in her eyes

was human star-dust, what cared a man that the shine in her brooch was rhinestones?

And leather- or vellum-covered books and first editions didn't alter the reading matter one jot. Goodness knows novels were plentiful enough at low prices. If you waited about a year, the new books came down to seventy-five cents in a Grosset & Dunlap binding, and if the novel was any good, a year wouldn't wither and stale its infinite variety. Perhaps at the end of the year you'd get the novel serially in the newspaper, only to find all the lies the press agent religiously promulgated about that book weren't true. Why worry? You'd forgotten what the blurb man wrote and very likely too you'd soon forget the book that author wrote —and you'd been saved two dollars and the dust-catching, superfluous volume around the house.

And wasn't any dish just a dish? It was the cooking that filled the dish and made it welcome. A well-done chicken was better than a badly prepared peacock. And the flowers she had she loved more than any that could be purchased for a price. It was like being given love instead of buying it. Those flowers she raised

with her own hands from the seed year after year; they were really and truly hers.

The cat approached the spread-eagle shirt with a view to making it his bed. Peg watched the sleek animal claw and claw at the bosom as if to tear out the heart. Then came a flash of revelation. All kinds of things had happened to the soldiers; they were the target for gunpowder and sin and vice. Some woman, a tigress perhaps, had sunk her teeth and talons into that boy's breast. How much harm she had done only God knew.

Peg gathered the shirt up gently to her bosom; held it close as if she hoped it would whisper the secret it hid over its owner's heart. She pressed the warm flannel against her cheek and sobbed into it. When she took off the lids to damp the fire, her tears fell on the gleaming coal. They seemed to hiss reproaches at her. She made a vow never to think an unkind thought again of Frank Snow. She had done him injustice.

She was too disturbed to sleep. The rain had stopped, so she went out into the tear-hushed night. She hung on the gate and listened to the music of the brook. When the wind rose, the

pines drowned the song of the water, then the water sang again and the pines hushed themselves to listen. Now and then a frog chimed in, a discordant note, as if a very untried musician tried to swell a symphony, or a mischievous child struck the piano treble in the midst of a nocturne. The moon found her way back to smile down on the earth, and then Peg became soothed and sleepy.

CHAPTER VII

VIOLET MCDANNELL was a born mischief-maker, a marplot, ever carrying a monkey-wrench to throw into somebody's works. She never oiled the machinery, but tossed sand into it. She preferred the screech of chagrin to the song of satisfaction.

She was head and ears in love with Frank Snow, so for that matter was Sara Barry. The soldier was a lady's man and didn't realize it. But Violet sneered at the prospect of that unwieldy Barry tortoise even being her rival in this love race. Frank piqued Miss McDannell by his lack of cordiality toward her. It wasn't what he did; it was what he didn't do. He rather ignored her, as one would a shadow when the sun was shining on a frosty day.

And she suffered the queasy sensation as his great deer's eyes, usually so soft, looked at her, that he *read* her character. His eyes were never soft when they studied the McDannell, though they ever were when he looked at Peg

Cleary; and his sober gaze was usually whimsical when it fell on Sara Barry, the toploftical, both physically and mentally. Sara to him no doubt was a joke. Violet to him was most likely in the shadow of a mossy stone entirely hidden from his ken. What—what, argued Violet, did Mr. Snow think of Peg? If he loved her, why did he let Raymond Sloupsky woo her so vehemently, shored up in his efforts by her father? Peg was pretty enough, but beyond that, what had she for a man? The Cleary colleen wasn't certainly as clever and experienced as she, Violet McDannell, the city nurse. Nurses knew so much; village girls so little.

Then a cue was given Miss McDannell, but like many another cue, she muffed it.

The peaceful boarding house—if you could call any place peaceful where Violet McDannell had her temporary habitat—Mrs. Cleary and Peg were terribly upset to find a plain-clothes man in the kitchen with a warrant for the arrest of—whom would you ever think? Poor quiet, easy-going, hungry-eyed Nicholas Dobberstein, and he at the selfsame hour slaving down in the bowels of the earth!

"It must be the wrong man," defended

Maggie. "Ye of the law are always catching the flies and letting the wasps go free."

"*When* did Mr. Dobberstein come to you?"

Sure enough the dates tallied. On that date a Nicholas Dobberstein had deserted his wife at Righter's Tunnel, a town beyond the mountain. At supper the guileless Nicholas didn't know or suspect who the stranger was or what his purpose, for Maggie swore death and destruction if Nicholas' stomach should be upset before he'd consumed his well earned evening meal, and she made the supper a specially good one for his benefit. Then in the sitting room Nicholas confessed to the detective and the household, while Peg wanted to screech laughing: he *was* the wife deserter! He made a clean breast of it with an air of infinite relief, as if it felt good to fling away a heavy load of guilt.

But his Coaltown friends were loyal, and would have accompanied him to the death. They were convinced Nicholas had been goaded to madness. Next day found them all in Squire Krepps' office, for the men skipped work.

Maggie, of course, had to go; wasn't herself subpœnaed as witness? She meant to make a good one for the defendant. Why, Nicholas

was nearly as dear to her as a son. Maggie having no boys of her very own, her big maternal heart went out to every young man in distress. She cherished very slight sympathy for woman's rights and privileges. Wasn't it the glory of woman that she could and should serve? God didn't make her an angel, but a two-footed, not twin-winged creature of flesh and bone, and the bones in her head shouldn't predominate and be cast-iron. Ah, musha, the female fools had the world upsot. They could never have did it nohow, if the men weren't so easy on 'em. Suppose, just suppose a man got mad and took a woman into his two hands, what was she then? Only a poor soft, flabby fish on a hook, no more defence to her nor a chicken. Squawk, beat wings, ruffle feathers; he could twist her neck. Put Maggie on a jury ever, and she'd land some ladies where they belonged—behind the bars. Work penciled eyes or silk ankles at her, and see how they'd count.

She vowed vengeance of diverse kinds of Peg if she ever mistreated her future husband. Of course, Maggie didn't look on her own husband Andy as a son, so what she did to him was quite all right. But Andy was the

kind of husband who might fall into temptation where the drink was concerned, and he did need a wife's sharp tongue and sharper eye over him to save him from himself. She once tracked him to a speak-easy run by a widow woman.

"If it wasn't for your baby," fumed Maggie, "I'd souse your head in that beer barrel!" Then Maggie flashed the glory of her wifehood on her lord and master, who sat in a dark corner with his two-fingers in the glass before him untasted. The abashed way he looked up at her, like a naughty little boy, gave her a terrible turn; in that moment he *was* her son. Her voice softened, if her face didn't. "As long as you have paid the poor widow for it, drink it down. Then you can give me the support of your good right arm up the road. The evening shadders are over the landscope, and who knows but out of the bush would hop a man to kiss me!"

The widow bartender chuckled as she saw them go cooing off together like a pair of turtledoves, and raising her eyes to a photograph, enlarged and heavily mustached, she sighed bitterly. God rest the soul of himself up there! who brung him the priest in his last

hour but that same Maggie Cleary, and who stayed the night through nursing the little son!

Maggie was related to the Finnegans, into which tribe poor Nicholas had married, though herself and that clan hadn't been on speaking terms for years. Whirra, Maggie knew the Finnegans, and she wondered that Nicholas hadn't gone to Shanghai instead of coming to her. A heavenly smile bathed Maggie's features when she heard the case was to be tried before Squire Levi Krepps. The right honorable justice was a cousin of Nicholas Dobberstein's stepmother's half-brother, so of course, was in the Dobberstein family by affinity, though remotely. Surely, surely when the squire saw one poor Dutchman set upon by all those Irish wildcats, his Krepps blood would come to the fore in aid of Nicholas. If that justice of the peace didn't deliver Nicholas out of the claws of the Finnegans, Maggie would rise up like Deborah and promulgate he was unworthy of the Teutonic father who gave him life; he was nuthin but a clam.

The Finnegans of Righter's Tunnel were a jealous tribe, the whole kit and kaboodle of 'em; the females ever suspicious naggers, snif-

fing the air till they got a straw up their nose and then sneezing murder all over the place. Maggie set her good-humored mouth in a hard, condemnatory line. It was just hapless Nicholas' bad luck to marry that red-headed Rose Finnegan; to pluck that handful of thorns. However, Maggie forgot that love makes a man's hands callous when he's among nettles.

Sara Barry arranged herself with meticulous care. Mme. Jeritza herself going before the matinee drums at the Metropolitan, never made up more delicately. She'd inquired of Raymond Sloupsky: "That squire is the gentleman who beat the drum, is he not?"

Raymond said he certainly was that same gentleman, and did forsooth treat criminals as musical instruments; he simply whacked the truth out of them. Squire Levi not only pounded Hail Columbia out of said drum, but he knew the law backwards, and nobody could get away with much on him. Raymond himself on one occasion had been haled before Squire Krepps for speeding through the main street and ignoring a "silent" policeman. The reckless young chauffeur shivering under the piercing eyes of Squire Levi, thought sure he was

booked for the "cooler," but suffered only a reprimand. The whole town shook in their shoes with awe of Magistrate Krepps, except when he banged his drum, and then they shook a wicked foot in the dance. Squire Levi could play when he played, but could slaughter when he was warring in the cause of justice, holiness and righteousness.

"Ah," sighed Sara deliciously, with an odd quaver in her heavy voice, "a dominant man!"

"Dominant, well I'll say," replied Raymond, with the air of a small boy recounting a ghost story in a midnight bedroom. "One wife-beater was brought before him, and Squire Krepps didn't fine or jail that cuckoo. Just slammed him across his knee, stretched his pants tight, then whanged him with half a barrel-stave till he hollered for mercy. So I have fears for Nicholas at the squire's hands."

Sara smiling, touched a little rouge to her sallow cheeks.

CHAPTER VIII

"God pity our poor Nicholas, Andy, on this memorial day!" quoth Maggie to her mate. "Them Finnegans! even in the days of me mother they had that rep."

"God pity all husbands!" echoed Andy.

"I might be druv to beat a man," ruminated Maggie openly, "but I could never nurse no jealousy of him."

"I often wondered, Maggie, where I'd saw Nicholas before. It comes back to me now, which I shouldn't have forgot. It was at the county fair——"

"No wonder you forgot to remember." She gave him an accusing look. "How did you come home from that fair? Hardly able to put a foot under you. 'Hic!' was all your elocution."

Andy spoke quickly to hush up about his indiscretion when he'd drunk too deep with the boys. "There was Nicholas and his new wife, Rosie Finnegan. You remember I won the Indian terra firma bust when the wheel of for-

tune span. Rosie's eyes popped out of her head with jealousy at that."

"She's always the same about everything and everybody, the green-eyed cat," accused Maggie. "Her mother was that same stripe."

"Rosie's a pretty cat just the same," Andy gave masculine approbation. "She really looks a bit like Peg."

"That's as far as the resemblance goes. All cats has claws," supplemented Maggie. "Your daughter won't never manhandle no husband to the courts of the land. I'll save me eyes from that one's beauty that can hug a husband like Nicholas and choke him."

The case developed in Squire Krepps' office. Frank Snow voted it as good as a two-reel movie. Rose Dobberstein, née Finnegan, related the prologue of their early marital happiness, while Nicholas hung down his handsome head in shame. Yes, Nick was all right if you didn't ask for too much brain or vocabulary in no man. Mrs. Dobberstein made it clear in an Irish brogue that she was the brains and vocabulary of their menage. Nicholas' head was still suspended; he spake naught.

"She's telling the truth," whispered Maggie to Andy. "He always uses short words and

them seldom. He got his elocution from the rosary; he told his beads every night. He had no more to say nor your Indian's terra firma bust. He's different from yourself. I'm lucky if I get a word in edgeways. When you ain't talking, you're snoring."

Now the plot thickened. Rose was certainly making a good confession of it. Lo, the other woman! the siren fair! the seductive vampire in the case! Enter Nellie Kane, a dashy young flapper. Nellie didn't really enter, being on vacation at Atlantic City—where she had hired out as waitress at a big hotel. She was sending all her tips home to her mother, and old Mrs. Kane had a new hat with a feather that would blind you. Nellie herself wouldn't return before the late autumn. Levi Krepps didn't summon Miss Kane from that big hotel; all girls had a right to their vacation.

Rose gave Nellie quite dishonorable mention. Anything of the masculine gender wasn't too hot or cold for that young one's wiles. She owned an eye like mine gas, and when males viewed her, they exploded, and some of them flew in pieces. It came out soon under the magistrate's deft questions that the Kanes and the Finnegans were at loggerheads, and Nel-

lie'd been snubbed by Rose, not even being invited to the wedding, so belike she did flirt at Nicholas to get even. Anyhow Nellie was the rift in the lute of the Dobberstein wedded bliss. The stolid squire, his keen eyes twinkling, interrupted Rose after he'd cast a look at the shame-swamped Nicholas.

"Mrs. Dobberstein," said the majesty of the law, with his gesture of beating the bass-drum, "do you think really your husband noticed Miss Kane at all, who isn't even here to talk for herself? He most likely didn't understand her tricks, if tricks she played. Happy married men don't pay much attention to young girls."

"He smiled at her!" declared Rose with fearsome accusation, shooting a vengeful look at Nicholas' sagging brow.

"I might have done the same," admitted his majesty, "indeed I might—as one would at a frolicsome young goat cavorting among the tomato cans in the back alley."

Anyhow that Nellie was the bone of contention. On that fatal, never-to-be-forgotten night of it, Rose started a one-sided battle with Nicholas, called him names of more than one syllable, and when he didn't answer her, she

called him more. The squire queried why was it Nicholas hadn't answered.

"He couldn't!" Maggie spoke too loud.

"Order in this court please, ladies and gentlemen!" The judiciary rapped with his gavel, again with the bass-drum gesture. Sara Barry remembering the dance and his wild music, quivered in response to this dominant man.

"How could he answer—say, you, Mag Cleary, shut your mouth; making remarks behind my back." Rose was in no pleasant frame of mind.

"I'm making them straight to your face, Rose Finnegan!"

"Order! Order in this court!" thundered the judicial king of Righter's Tunnel.

"My husband didn't and couldn't answer me, Your Honor, because he knew he was guilty of in-die-screetion with that young Kane hussy."

"Please don't call the young lady names, Mrs. Dobberstein; she's not here to defend herself. She's at Atlantic City. How would you feel if she came home drowned?"

"I'd send her a whole conservation of lilies."

"Continue the case please."

"Nicholas didn't answer; no, he didn't answer me nuthin."

"Yes, you told us that before. What did he do?"

"Nuthin."

"What did *you* do?"

"I up and pasted him a good one square between the eyes."

"Mrs. Dobberstein, do you mean to tell this court that a rather small, frail woman like you——"

"Frail, the divil!" hissed Maggie into Andy's ear. "Herself, a Finnegan, with a wallop like a mule's two hind legs!"

"You really had the remarkable courage to attack a great big man like your husband?"

"I hit him before he expected it, you see. 'Twas me only chanct."

"It's a rare husband, Mrs. Dobberstein, particularly a German masterful husband, who'll accept a blow from his wife—and a good one square between the eyes. I presume you are not German, and so didn't understand that. What did Mr. Dobberstein do?"

"Herself's getting in Dutch now," Maggie winked at Andy and she grinned all the way down her neck.

"He got up muttering like a bear with the toothache, grabbed me in his two big hands and lifted me near the ceiling."

"Did he open the upper story window and fling you out into the back yard?"

"He did not."

"Did he bounce you down hard on the floor?"

"He did not, sir. He set me down gentle in a chair that had a cushion."

"Oh! I presume that was another proof of his guilt. He's kind and gentle with women. A strong man usually is."

Sara Barry fanned her feverish cheek with a newspaper; Squire Levi had glanced at her.

"Then he packed himself off that night," went on Rose, "and that same night away went Nellie Kane from town."

"Was that a proof he went with her?"

Rose paused. "I know now he didn't."

"How do you know?"

"She was in Philadelphy nursing her sister who had twins. It runs in the Kane family."

"What runs?"

Rose bit her lips. "Well, anyhow Nicholas did run; he ran away from me."

"I think you knocked him out, didn't you?"

"But I didn't *lock* him out. The door was there standing for him to come back."

"Mrs. Andrew Cleary!" called his honor. Maggie promptly arose and made her way to the front. She was a good witness for the defence. Andy eyed her, fearing he'd split out in the courtroom. Arrah, God made only one like his Maggie; that's till Peg came along to live out the life of her mother. Maggie told of the battered husband landing under her hospitable roof, bearing the marks of recent corporal punishment. In troth, she doctored his black eye.

"Mrs. Cleary, just how did Mr. Dobberstein look?"

"As if struck with lightning and then mutilated by an ottermobile."

"Oh, don't make it worse, Mag Cleary!" screeched Rose.

"The dates agree as you've given them. He came straight to you when he deserted his wife. Did he—ah—try to flirt with you?"

"God pity the boy, he hadn't heart enough to hold up his head. Even his stomach went to the bad. He lost weight with the over-feeding I gave him, and every time he seen me red hair or me daughter's, he grew despondent,

for it made him—I can see it now—think of his wife."

"Did he pay his bills? Was he lavish with money?"

"He gave me seven dollars a week board."

"Oh, you robber!" cried Rose. "To take that much from my poor man!"

"Mrs. Dobberstein, please do not interrupt our witness. You may confuse her."

"Confuse me, is it! I could ass-tound her grandmother and her whole race." Maggie waxed eloquent, also red in the cheeks prettily. "Lavish with money? He was—on herself there! He never had no cent after his board. He sent it all somewheres by the parcel post."

"That will do, Mrs. Cleary, thank you. Nicholas Dobberstein!"

A shamed, handsome young man got up with faltering feet and came down front. He looked like a nanny-goat pursued by hounds.

"Yes," Rose arose out of all order, "he sent me his money through his father, and that low-lived old Dutchman wouldn't give me tale or tidings of my husband. Look at him standing! That big brute dee-deserted me!" accused Rose, shaking a finger at Nicholas. Her finger shook just then more than she intended.

"Guilty!" mumbled Nicholas who felt he must say something; not stand like a numskull.

"Were you tired of your pretty little wife?" the justice was probing.

"Never!" was the fervent answer.

"But you stayed away four months."

"Four months and three days," added Nicholas, holding up three weak digits, but not his head.

"Why?" There came no answer to break that tense silence. *"Why?"*

"Squire, I was ashamed to go back to her. I wasn't sure she'd want me."

"And you, a six-foot man, left a frail little woman like your wife to—to *battle alone?"*

"I—I'm sorry, Squire." His honor could see only the crown of the young husband's head; his chin was down in the middle of his neck.

Suddenly there was an explosion. It was Rose in tears; in wild hysterics. She flared up to the man of the courts and shook her fist close to his nose. Indeed she did display notable contempt for the person of the noble judge.

"Don't you shame my man, do you hear that? you old law machinist! Pound the divil out of your old drum if you like, but keep your tongue off my Nicholas. He did nuthin at all.

Squire, saving your presence and everybody's presence—except that Mag Cleary, I'm a liar! I druve me fist into his face and near knocked his two eyes into window panes in the back of his head, but he spared me the beating I merited. I was jealous of him and him that simple. With one clout, he could have thrun me into the middle of the Sesqui-Centennial, but he pitied me. His temper egged him on to sock me down on the floor, but his heart wouldn't let him. What could he do otherwise but leave me? Would you yourself have stayed the night after I gave you one in the snoot? Battle alone! *battle alone!* that's what's wrong with me now, I have me own heart punched sore. Every two weeks came his money to me, hardly leaving himself enough for tobacco—and that outrageous Mag Cleary's board bill. Oh, she got hers all right, all right, never you fear; the Irish Shylock that she is. A Jew would faint before her. There was no address for me to get him back, was there? Then why blame him, as you're after doing? He's a man of few words, but his money talked for him. Didn't it come to me through his father?"

She wheeled away from the stern, cold judge and flared upon Nicholas, whose yellow

head was rising up like a sunflower, now turning toward his goddess. "There you stand, you big *omadhaun,* taking all the blame when you ought to be cleaning out this courtroom with me. Deserted me! did you ever hear the like? If it deserts you're talking about, I ought to get mine. Nick, my angel!" Her lovely thin arms were wide outflung.

So were Nicholas'. The way he took her proved he was very much of a man at that, and down came his big kiss hard on the babbling mouth of her. Peg's slender fingers were unconsciously digging deep into Frank Snow's biceps, and tears were rolling down the round of her cheeks.

"Oh, Frank! did you see Nicholas' face? Angels must look as happy as that! We've lost our Nicholas."

"That's the real love all right," answered the ex-soldier in a queer, raspy voice.

"Case dismissed," boomed the German squire solemnly. "Costs put on the county. Clerk, three dollars for Mrs. Andrew Cleary, our estimable witness. Happy good day to you all!"

The court adjourned for refreshments, which simply meant that the squire went into

the back room where his beer awaited him. As he raised the tin bucket to his nose, he burst out into a horse-laugh, and suds bespattered the already far from spotless wallpaper. The majesty of the law lifted his head out of the bucket, and then let that lightened vehicle fall to the table. Out there standing on the lofty ash heaps was a vision of regal womanhood; none other than Sara Barry herself. Her near-sighted eyes were sweeping the gorgeous cerulean dome in the distance over the sky line of the trees. She looked like one who'd forgotten the world; was quite beyond mundane things, rapt by the poetry of wedded love and life and nature. For her in that moment there was nothing animal on earth. Squire Krepps felt his heart beat like his beloved bass-drum.

Then he sighted probable disaster for that queenly creature. Approaching with fell design on the person of Sara was old "Smicker," a notorious billy-goat, with horns lowered; every moment bringing him closer to his fair victim. He picked his way cautiously, lest he frighten too soon the quarry. The squire needed no "sneaky" music to give him the thrill of that villain creeping upon a helpless virgin.

He flung wide the door, rushed down the

steps with the tin beer bucket, smashed it on Smicker's head and sent him a-skuting, and flung wide his arms just as Sara sagged against his gallant breast. He'd saved her in the nick of time. The squire himself sagged slightly in the hamstrings, but it wasn't Sara's ponderosity. It was the delicious shock of holding perfect, flawless womanhood again, he who'd been widowed in his early love.

He invited Sara sometime to visit his lonely home, and after such a rescue, what could a virgin do but say she'd certainly come?

"You've never been in New York City?" Sara prattled prettily, her nerveless hand still on his arm.

"No. You see, Miss Barry, I do hate to travel all by myself. I'm sure I'd get lost."

"But you must see New York, Squire, you must. Why, a man of your great intelligence and vast legal acumen could grace the courts of our Empire City."

"I don't think I'd want to be in the courts of New York," said the squire boyishly. "You understand to date I've never had a divorce to try, and I wouldn't like to sit in on one."

"No, to an intellect like yours, Squire, that would be quite terrible; that legal murder of

love—or should I say illegal? What right have the courts to lay cold hands on hearts that love? Ugh! it makes me think of that lady to whom her lover's heart was served in a hash." And Sara gave him her fair hand.

With the grace of an ordinary king—weren't most of the kings fat and awkward!—he kissed her ink-stained middle finger. She could not forget the press of his mouth, though her hand did smell of beer for an hour.

The two lady boarders went back to Coaltown with different thoughts about two different men. Sara rushed at once to her Corona and hammered out a new story for her editors, and got a very prompt acceptance that time. Splendid local color, the magazine informed her. "And your love scenes are the best yet." Sara sighed happily and hummed *O Promise Me!* in a deep bass like the roll of a softly smitten drum.

Peg came home—was forced to do it—in the runabout with Raymond Sloupsky. He was quite taken with Nicholas' wife, while Peg said she felt like knocking Rose over. Then Raymond sped up and got away from the others and started to make love to Peg. The result was he became so earnest that he

nearly let the car shoot down into the culm creek where they'd have been buried in a quicksand. Peg to shut him up took the wheel herself. As she refused to talk, saying she had her mind intent on the driving, Raymond nearly set her wild whistling shrilly. She began to understand why wives might paste a man between the eyes.

Maggie bought Andy a new pipe with the three dollars. Frank Snow watched Peg and Raymond vanish, as he himself sat stiffly between the two elderly maidens. He had a faraway look in his eyes and made no attempt to keep up conversation. He couldn't forget the expression on Nicholas' face when he flung his arms about his wife.

Have you ever been driving in June with all the world at its best; not the hottest part of the summer when the streams go dry? June with its roses and bright-winged butterflies and gay-voiced birds and little children along the road, merry because school tasks are laid away. And the flowers are in bloom and the trees green and laughing and the skies are fair and the clouds soft and white as a baby's little clothes. And in your heart is an empty ache, the abomination of desolation; before your

eyes a bleak, overhanging cloud that sets you away from happiness; and a dull despair, a grim determination possesses you to go on and on somehow, because it's God's will. You realize you're doing right, but duty done won't fill the human hunger of your heart.

Poor Frank was walking that hard desert road of the soul while he rode along in the gay sunshine.

He didn't feel Violet McDannell's eyes boring into his sullen face, trying to penetrate behind that mask of virile beauty. Perhaps anyhow he wouldn't have cared, he was so soul-sick. He'd skimmed the cream of love, but in the thunder of a horrible shock he found it turned sour.

Sara Barry was too busy trying to keep every detail of the trial in her memory, every nuance of Rose Dobberstein's voice, against the moment when she could hurl herself upon the type machine. She wanted to be faithful to the minutiæ, yet she knew her memory was treacherous; all the more treacherous today because her pulses were beating in delirious rhythm: "I've been in a man's arms! He saved me from that indecent billy-goat and butted himself straight into my affections. And such

a man! Oh, what a mouth! Only a kiss on the knuckles, but what it meant to me! That mustache! it added like salt on an egg."

That night Frank sat at his open window listening to the frogs and the whippoorwills. The bird beyond the little schoolhouse sang at first with deliberation. Now he was putting on steam and shrilling in double-quick fashion as if his heart was beating fast. The soldier wondered if his mate had come to him. Far off down below in the swamp the frogs sounded like drops of water falling rapidly on silver bells.

At that same time Violet McDannell sat alone under the climbing roses on the front porch, and though the night was sweet with spring, the moon riding high, the stars at their capers, the virgin thought bitter, vengeful thoughts. There had been a woman all the while in Nicholas Dobberstein's life. Wasn't there also a woman in Frank Snow's? *She'd find out!* She might ruin him with the Clearys. She would if she could. Hell hath no fury like a virgin scorned; particularly when she's beyond thirty.

CHAPTER IX

THE collieries were running only four days a week now, and Maggie saw to it that her poor idle laborers wouldn't get low-spirited. She made very good home-brew beer, plenty of it, and she wasn't stingy with her beverage.

"It's in the body of the jail she'll have us all," acclaimed Andy after his third refreshing glass. "What if Anthony Comstock gets after her?"

Sara looking over the brim of her glass, thought how much Andy was like a cocoanut; crusty and rough and hairy outside, but the sweet milk of human kindness bubbling within. And how well Maggie managed him. He was her life work, and she made a success of her job surely. When Andy started some narrative that his wife didn't fancy, or began to tell tales from school, or maybe fell into some of his mine vocabulary, Maggie's warm blue eyes changed to pale watery ice, and then in trying to end his conversation without showing too much of the white feather, he reminded of a

rooster hurrying up to finish his crow before he got hit with a pebble.

"I have a pull now with that Dutch squire in Righter's Tunnel," said Maggie, "and 'tis to him I'd ask to be took. I'd be acquitted before Charlie Chaplin would. And where's the jury of the male speeches that could resist me! Let ye all drink and make merry, for there's more in the cellar." Miss Barry, the writer, informed everybody that Mr. Comstock was by this date an angel or something. "It do make me feel safer," breathed Maggie with overacted relief.

"We've got one on Henry Ford anyhow," said Frank Snow merrily. "His men work five days a week, and he doesn't drink beer, and he won't let them. Lips that touch liquor shall blow up none of Henry's rubber bands that he calls tires."

Violet McDannell arrowed the handsome big fellow a biting look; she was honestly growing to hate him for his ignoring of herself. "Mr. Ford," she purred, but one could hear her sharpening her claws, "is the saviour of our country. And he's very particular about the men he hires."

"He ain't," contradicted Raymond Sloupsky, with foam on his bristled lip that hadn't

been shaved for three days. "I worked in Dearborn. And I have more here at four days a week than I had there with six. Anyhow what do we care who saves our country?—we'd all do that. But who saves our lives for us? Mrs. Cleary!"

"For that Raymond, down I go to the cellar and fill the bucket again." And Maggie fairly rolled down the stairs, but she landed on her feet miraculously instead of on another part of her anatomy.

Neither Maggie nor Peg took beer, only ate the salted crackers. Violet drank a good deal, and she studied the lovely girl over her glass rim. "I see our Peg doesn't indulge. Her husband will have all the more to drink for himself."

Young Raymond bridled up at that. "Her husband, whoever he'll be, even if he was Captain Pilsudski, will be so darn proud of her he won't have time to stop for eat or drink."

"He'll drink to her only with his eyes," added the soldier.

Peg glanced at him with appreciation and read a great deal in his own eyes, which he incontinently lowered, while a distressed blush mantled his ruddy cheeks.

"Well said," put in the jovial Sara. "Peg's a liberal education."

"Thank the Lord," said Frank, "she knows her cook book anyhow."

Violet winced at that cruel dig: she'd tried to make a cake the other day. Maggie told Andy under cover of night the young chickens were droopy ever since they consumed it. They acted as if they had the roup. They walked round and round in a circle shaking their heads as if sadder and wiser.

Then the two young lads went off for a swim. Andy departed for a nap. He needed it and Maggie advised it, though he was so ostentatiously, also loquaciously sober, but she threatened to be his death if he got into bed with his shoes on.

"Couldn't you be leaving a needle sticking in me bed again or belike a pitchfork or something?" he asked with quavers in his voice.

Maggie blessed herself like a streak of lightning. "Oh, God pertect us! I'd swalley every needle in this house before I'd have you summons all the evil spurts as you did when you set on that needle!"

Frank on his way out to the swimming hole found Peg working at his mine coat. He

glanced at her and saw she was trying to keep a solemn face. His sombre eyes brightened in that glorious way they had. It was the signal she was waiting for; she went off in a peal of laughter.

"Frank, when you tore this sleeve lining out, how dared you sew that black stuff with white thread! Can't you get out of your head your baching days are over?"

He flushed slightly with embarrassment, and again Peg saw he was afraid of her. He was like a mouse sniffing cheese that yet knew it was a trap. "Go ahead and ruin me for time and eternity," he said. "I'm an army man, and I wasn't in Coxey's army either. You're the first woman ever pressed my clothes. You could shave with the crease in my Sunday serge. But this pulling to pieces my sewing—I'll owe you a trip to Paris."

She looked up at him in pigeon fashion. "I'd sooner you'd take me sometime to see Paris in the movies."

"All right, I will whenever you say so. I'm getting off cheaply at two bits for the round trip."

"And I'm being more than repaid for ripping the wild stitches you sewed."

Maggie felt the kitchen hot, so she came out into the garden and sat under the big cherry tree that ran up close to the side of the house. She didn't need to fan herself here. Lifting her eyes she beheld high up in the tree a tremendous pair of knickerbockers. She stared aghast, then crept in to tell Peg. "Me beer's good, child; fine."

"I think from dad's snores it's superfine."

"No, listen; it's put Sara Barry off in her head. She's climbed up into the cherry tree. She's 'way up on the third big limb."

"*Sara!* Well, she'd better stick to the biggest limb or down she'll hurtle. Up a tree for pity's sake."

Just then the dog brought in a part of a little pad in his mouth, and Peg snatched it away from him. She read in Sara's scrawl:

"Far to the east floated clouds, clouds; white and gold-tinted against a sapphire sky. A—a—" Peg couldn't quite make out the word, so she said, "A cuckoo or something flew into the azure. The tree swayed as if its old heart was throbbing with the love of spring——"

Then echoed a shrill screech; came the sounds of a stormy goddess descending, and Peg rushed out to find Sara like Absalom

caught by the wool in the lower branches. Peg and Maggie were carrying two stout chairs from the kitchen to meet the tree-climbing lady's feet, lest she visit the earth too roughly. But that was just what Sara did. In her mad impatience she pulled her head loose from the twigs and leaves, tearing out a few wisps of hair. The sudden jerk caused her to lose her balance, and she flopped down from one limb to another. The second limb creaked, then cracked and broke under her weight, and the mighty displacement of Sara crashed down into the onion bed which she practically ruined. She arose unhurt, whatever about the protruding scallions; shook herself a little, then turned with her wonted smile, though still was she abstracted. Peg gave the story writer the pages.

"Oh! I thought they were gone, and I howled in despair. The wind blew them away on me. You see I have a sheik who's climbing a tree to get the fair maid from the tower window, and I wanted to catch it at first hand. The humor's on me, so I must finish it."

Her near-sighted eyes held a far-distant look, so naturally she didn't see what was at her feet. She went crashing over the chairs, almost turned a somersault.

"Oh," cried Maggie, "did you hurt your shins?"

"Of course, I did. Say, Maggie Cleary, do you think I have wooden legs?" Then Sara laughed a bit. "Maybe you've got my head and my legs mixed up."

"I couldn't make head or tail of yourself when I first peeped up in the tree, Sara. I didn't know what you were. But with all the bumps you've had in five minutes, the wonder is you ain't fainting."

"Haven't time to faint now; I may do that later. I must get this thing out of me and down on paper." And like a catapulted wooden Grecian horse, she rushed up to her Corona, her hair floating behind like a scraggy tail. In her plus-fours she suggested neither man nor boy and certainly not woman.

"So she was the sheik up in the tree," mused Maggie.

"Coming down, she looked more like the sheik's tent," tagged on Peg giggling.

The creator of the sheik tree-toad met Violet McDannell at the door of Frank Snow's room, which of course in this house wasn't locked. Not a door in the place was except the street exits at night. Sara thought nothing of it; she

concluded Violet was in a rarely generous mood (perhaps the beer had affected her) and was making the beds for Peg. To the distant drumbeat of Andy's slumbers, Sara made a virulent attack on her typewriter, and young hearts began to beat on her pages. The atmosphere up here in these mountains was just charged with youth and love and beauty, and Sara was doing one good story a week. She was in high feather, and the sunshine and laughter sparkled even in her rough draft. Heretofore the hero with furnace eyes had sought the fair one's lips; now his fiery mouth was swallowing her knuckles! One blasé married editor tittered at Sara's locating the objective in the fist: "Gives that heroine too good a chance to punch him in the nose! I myself yearn to kick him under the coat-tails."

If she'd been nursing Violet's nasty spirit of revenge, Sara couldn't have written so wholesomely. Miss McDannell had been alone in a gentleman's room for over a quarter of an hour, rummaging, which was hardly a ladylike procedure. His tobacco pouch, his cheap cigars, his seven handkerchiefs, his darned clothing, his five collars, his four pairs of socks and the unheeded war medal. She looked in every se-

cret hole and corner, and then right on the top of his chiffonier, where there was no attempt at concealment, she discovered what she wanted: an envelope with a blond woman's picture and her name and address. It was a really pretty face, not so pretty as Peg's, the face of a woman more worldly wise, also the face of a woman who found life serious and difficult. It could be the face of a woman who'd been deserted by the man she loved; a wife left with only a ring to keep her memories bright. Miss McDannell was too foxy to take anything away with her from the room; everything was left just as it had been, but she penciled down the name and address.

The boys came back from their swim feeling fine for supper, though Raymond complained a crab had pinched his toe.

"I guess he thought your foot was a shark," remarked Frank, on his way upstairs to take a brief nap. The soldier never suspected he'd been robbed. Raymond bounded into his own room like a three-year-old and got himself into a garish silk shirt. While he was buttoning it, he saw through the window Peg making her way with the two buckets up to the spring. That place with its wild beauty nature made

for lovers. Raymond was none of the poet, but he understood that much. Peg was just ready to start on the homeward lap when the Polish suitor flew panting to her like some hopelessly crossed bird that had variegated plumage.

"Let's go back there under the trees, Peg, for fear somebody'd come and butt in on us."

The girl understood immediately. "No, we'll do it right here, Raymond. Shoot!"

He backed down a bit under that reception, but a glance at his shirt of many colors was sufficient to revive him. "Peg, your dad likes me, so does your mother. I'm crazy about you. We could be married even on four days a week."

"I know we could, Raymond, but we can't. I don't love you."

She kept the two heavy buckets of water in her hands to indicate he must be brief. He took the buckets from her and set them down. She let him lead her over to the big gravel rock worn smooth from the children rubbing its side. She sat very calm, but drew her hand out of his. Their both hands together felt like nutmeg graters. Hers, though as small as a child's, were nearly as hard as his, but hers were far better kept and the nails quite even.

His looked as if he dug coal with his fingers rather than with his pick. Frank Snow, the ex-army man, the soldier always, took better care of his fingers and nails. They were the hands of a gentleman worn with toil. This lad was just an uncouth laborer, and Frank could never be only that.

"But, Peg, what the deuce do either of us really know about love? We're only a pair of kids, ain't we? I feel like Mr. Christopher Columbus, and I want to find the new country. You're the whole of America to me, you know."

"Raymond, you're a nice boy, and I do like you all over. You're just like a good dependable brother to me, but no girl would want to marry her brother. I'd run to you from a snake. I'd feel safer with you than with a policeman or a pair of bulldogs or Squire Krepps and his thundering drum. But I wouldn't for all of Columbus' America, ever let you kiss me. You see."

"If I gave you one good kiss, you might change your mind."

"That poor old mind, Raymond, is too firmly made up, and all your nice kisses wouldn't mean a darn."

He chewed his lips a little, then eyed her shrewdly. "You're in love with Frank Snow, like those two other ladies."

"And what if we all are?"

"He can marry the other two if he likes, but you— Oh! I'd like to smash his beautiful straight nose."

"That wouldn't straighten out my old heart, would it?"

"No, I guess it wouldn't. But honest, Peg, I'd better warn you. There's something wrong with that guy; I don't know what it is. Maybe that old shell shock. Lots and lots of queer things happened the soldiers; things girls don't know anything about." Raymond checked himself. "Frank's all wrapped up in himself about something, and he may never marry you at all, because I don't think he loves you one bit. Mind," Raymond hastened to clear himself of the suspicion he'd been blabbing about another man, "he's a good fellow, but I can't get him. Just like some gangways we have in the mines; you don't know what's in all that dark stretching out in there. You don't go into 'em, for you might get your neck broke."

"I understand, Raymond; you've made it very clear. But I can't help the dark, gloomy

gangway in Frank, whatever it is. I know like you it's there, and I'd love to take his hand and walk bravely through the dark with him, keeping only our trust in God and our faith in each other."

Raymond looked at her with a great reverence. "Peg, my God, you're a wonderful girl!"

"All women are that way, Raymond; you don't know anything about us. We'd walk through the blackest dark with the man we loved, even though we knew in advance that, bang! we'd get our necks broken at the climax. What's a little thing like a broken neck when you die for somebody you love? Does God ever forget?" She turned her big earnest blue eyes on him and smiled a little with her lips, not very much but enough to suit him. "And let me tell you when it comes to a fine man, young fellow, you're no piker yourself. I do hope you soon meet *your* woman. I'm sorry I'm not it."

"Peg, I can't do anything for you now, but maybe I will some day. But I can do this much: I'll tell your dad I got cold feet, and called off the marriage because of the four days a week."

"I'd like that, Raymond."

"But first, Peg, first: isn't there any little chance? Maybe if I just kissed you once, the way that brute did in the movie. You remember how she opened her eyes wide at the smack he gave her. And he had a worse nose than I have, twice as big. Heavens, he knocked her for a goal, and she wasn't half as nice as you. Do you think—if I had a different shirt on, you might—let me; just one good big hug and a tussle and a clinch and an I'll-die-for-thee kiss?"

"Raymond, if you came to me riding on the Prince of Wales' whole stable of horses with his derby cocked over your eye, and General Pershing's decorations on your shirt front, and had Gene Tunney's nose, your kiss wouldn't arrive. I'm detoured for life."

He carried the water to the house for her, and at supper appeared in a shirt far, far more resplendent. It positively was the Seven Deadly Sins in lurid tracings. Sara Barry made a note of it for future "copy," but if he'd asked Sara for a kiss even in that shirt, she'd have submitted graciously. But you see he didn't. All the kisses in poor Sara's life were confined to those she wrote herself, and they were never X's. Ah, yes, there was one kiss!

that kiss salted with the big mustache that dripped the sweetness of beer! Sometimes she almost feared she'd just written that; it didn't actually happen. But then looking at her knuckle she realized yes, in truth she'd been kissed—but of all places!

Miss McDannell was very quiet at supper, but her eyes through their lashes watched every move of Frank Snow. He ate like a man with a good conscience, but as she judged the male species, men with faces like his could hide millions of mischiefs. However, Violet McDannell in spite of her nurse's experiences with pettish sick males, mustn't have been able to read masculine character very well. Opposite to her sat a brawny young specimen eating like a couple of horses, and yet under his gay and flagrant shirt throbbed a broken heart. All that Miss McDannell saw was the vein throbbing in his stout, hearty neck. She quietly posted a letter that evening.

CHAPTER X

Peg and her mother were as usual busy as beavers. They were pickling and preserving and jarring. Maggie knew how to run her house cheaply. Good thing that she did. In her way she was as great a benefit to the poor as Henry Ford. Her boarders didn't rise up and call her blessed, but they felt like doing it. Anyhow if they did arise with that purpose, so would Maggie and run. The only male or female she wished to sing her praises was that husband of hers, and Andy did, though not too frequently. He'd never spoil his woman with soft words, but he adored her and she knew it. To him she was a compound of St. Ann and the Blessed Virgin, and the divil himself by times. But isn't it nice when you're middle-aged and git tired more quicker nor you did in your yout', and your husband comes in and pays you a great big compliment! Musha, Maggie did love the sly compliment from Andy now and then. It bucked her up and she worked like a fat little mare that had been

given a fresh apple or a lump of sugar belike.

Peg had a palatable morsel of news for her mother: "You didn't hear it yet. Rose Finnegan has a young son for our Nicholas."

"Oh, do you tell me that! The poor girl. I knew in the heart of me there was something wrong with her; I just knew it, or would she have flew into me the way she did in that squire's office? What was it she called me? Shoot-Locks or something; I guess because me hair was blew with the wind. And a big Jewess because I took seven dollars a week board."

"Rose sent down word to our farmer with her mother when he stopped at her door to stop here on his road home and let you know. So you can see she's sorry for——"

"She needn't be sorry. She wasn't herself at all, of course. Would she have yanked Nicholas into the courts was she normal? Never! Child, you'll find it out for yourself when your time comes. When a woman's going to have a baby, she's so busy with that young life that she don't always give everybody else no square deal. It's like God creating the world; I judge He was wearing a terrible frown, or would He ever have made the snakes and centerpedes? Oh, but didn't I love Rose when she

rushed up to claw the whiskers out of the Judge Krepps! I could have went to help her. Us women may fight among ourselves, but it ain't natural to stand by and see no sister woman in distress. I hope poor Rose don't get the weed in the breast the way her mother used to. Did Rose invite me to see her?"

"Did she! She wants you and nobody else for the lad's godmother. She says she can never repay you for your kindness to Nicholas and the way you stuck up for him in the court. She said her own mother couldn't have done better. The baby's to be named Andrew after dad; Nicholas and she both want it. She declares she'll bear any number of children for her darling of a Dutchman, but she'd die before they ever get Dutch names."

" 'Tis the great wisdom on her. A wife must assert herself in some ways, you see, or the divil wouldn't never hold the men down; particularly when a baby comes. The father wants the world to think the child is all his, but if any man had to face the ordeal of bringing in a baby, he'd at once become an old maid or a mother superior belike. Your dad wanted to name yourself after an old aunt of his who once gave him a fearful licking, because he tied a

can on her cat's tail. But I got me Irish up and called you after meself. Then to me horror I found out I'd played right into his hands, for 'twas my name he really wanted on you. He said he knew if he broached the subject, I'd say no first crack, so he gave me me chance. Now who'd have thought it was in him? You see you can't never be up to the men with the schemes on them, the traitors. Violet McDannell was in Righter's Tunnel. 'Tis a wonder herself didn't bring us the good news."

"She didn't go to see Rose. Violet is always afraid of catching sickness; maybe she was afraid she'd catch that."

Miss McDannell came into the kitchen to tell Maggie she was expecting a guest for a few days, a lady friend.

"We've got plenty of room for her," agreed the landlady cheerfully, "and I did land an elegant country ham this morning from the farmer. Is herself sick?"

"I think she's love-sick," Violet told that slyly.

"Only one way to cure that ailment," laughed the good-natured wife. " 'Twould be nice to have a couple of weddings, and how I'd cook for 'em! I think it renews a woman when

she gets as old as me to fuss and fly around at a wedding. Many things may happen in a woman's life, but musha, she's got but the one wedding. Oh, of course, widows may remarry, and who'd blame them? Not me surely. Men can prove themselves pests, but a woman without no man is a movie without no music. But your first marriage is *the* one. You never get that out of your system. Mrs. McGilicuddy was married three times, and she said as often as the Lord took 'em, so would she; but she told me with her own lips she always tries to pick up a husband with a wart on him somewheres, because her first man had a big one on his nose. She has him enlarged in her front room, and I'll say the wart ain't beauty-doctored out of him. The second feller is there on her wall too, but he ain't got the place of honor. His wart was on his left ear. If Mrs. McGilicuddy buries this third man, there won't be no room in their cemetery lot for herself, and she do need a lot of room. You see her mother was married twice; had children for both men, and they're all in that lot."

Violet maliciously got Peg's ear on the sly and upset the girl terribly. She convinced the colleen that the woman coming with such speed

was the real cause of Frank Snow's worried look. Nicholas Dobberstein had run away from a wife; most likely so had the soldier. Weren't soldiers always doing it? Didn't one veteran have to share his compensation with three women? Were the men in khaki so different from the sailors in blue that had a wife in every port?

And so Violet's letter worked its effect. It brought to Coaltown a woman who'd known Frank Snow and who'd loved him; perhaps still did. Now they'd find out if he loved her or should love her. She came, small, blond and pretty, and Maggie took to her at once. Frank was doing a bit of overtime at the works, and the other men were home before him. The stranger felt at once as kindly toward the motherly Maggie as Maggie did toward her.

Through the informality of the boarding house, the visitor committed a *faux pas* which wasn't considered serious at Coaltown. She came into the kitchen at the wrong time. You see the miners washed themselves after their day in the pits in the out-shanty, but it was an old building and the shingles pretty well warped and cracked on the roof, so that the rain came in. This evening there was a drizzle,

and it was damp and chilly enough to be October instead of July. So when Raymond Sloupsky came home, Maggie filled his tub with hot water in the kitchen. Why should the child be chilled out in that cold shed and belike get an icy dropper down his spine?

So Raymond with his shirts off was kneeling in his overalls at the tub scrubbing and lathering his breast. That trunk of his was Raymond's one great beauty. If a sculptor or artist ever used Raymond for a model, he'd utilize him from the chin to the waist, and certainly get somebody else for the head. It was such a pity that that torso had to be hidden under those excruciating silk shirts. Raymond should have had a special license to go, like the primitive American, bare-breast. Maggie was in the midst of a ballad:

"A dollar in the tavern is very easily spent.
If you had it in old Ireland, it would help to pay
the rent."

The little blond visitor came into the kitchen to Maggie, who thought no more of the boy kneeling by the tub than he did of herself. The young Pole jumped up with a gasp and ran behind the generous form of his landlady. She

went off into a laugh, which the new little girl echoed. Raymond was minded to turn tail and dart out into the real wash house, but it was raining, and he'd have no towels or tub, and wasn't the kitchen door shut? and he was afraid to run lest he lose his overalls, which were none too secure about the waist. Maggie plucked off her big apron and pushed it back into his hand. But in that moment the bright-eyed blonde saw the most magnificent torso she ever beheld on a human being. She had viewed hundreds of torsos, being a nurse. Men's chests meant nothing in her young life, for she'd seen them often cut and bleeding, (one with a bayonet slash running from right shoulder to left hip,) while she stood praying silently for the sufferer.

Wrapped in Maggie's gingham and in his bare feet, Raymond was presented to Miss Teenie Cope, who'd been Frank Snow's nurse at the soldiers' hospital. The girl's splendid self-possession and lack of embarrassment put the Polish lad at his ease, and he was very grateful to her. He was red as a beefsteak with the blushes on him, Maggie told Andy later, and the wedded pair laughed about it in unison. Teenie had the good taste to go out of the

kitchen at once, but being of an artistic bend, she remembered that splendid torso, and wished such a blending of beautiful pink muscle could be put somewhere in a museum to tell the world that everything isn't ugly.

Frank later in the evening, when he was having his belated supper, met Teenie, and Violet saw at once she was cheated. Whatever Teenie had or hadn't thought of Frank, there was really nothing between them. The cat crawled upstairs and fairly wept with vexation. She'd made a fool of her own self really. Hadn't she hinted to Peg that Frank Snow, like Nicholas Dobberstein, was probably hiding away from a wife he'd left in the lurch, and how she'd relished the swift misery that captured Peg's eyes and countenance! The skinny trouble-brewer now looked like an arrow that hit a rock.

Frank took Teenie to the movies at Righter's Tunnel, and what passed between them going and coming nobody would ever know. But Miss Cope being a wise little soul as well as a fine nurse, decided that her ex-patient was not for her and never would be. She was heartily sick of maidenhood, tired, worn-out at her hard job, and instead of look-

ing after ten or twenty more or less troublesome young men, she yearned to have one man all for herself, that she could expend her skill on him and him alone.

She stayed on at the Cleary boarding house, and though it was Violet who brought her on, she spent very little time with Miss McDannell. The lady who sent the invitation, telling she herself was a registered nurse, and luring Teenie from the mountain fastness, Violet was just the type of hypochondriac that Teenie did not cultivate.

So Teenie became far more friendly with the whole-souled Maggie and Peg and Sara Barry. Teenie watching Peg, thought she understood Frank Snow now; surely he couldn't resist this beautiful, unspoiled little mite of the mountains. Every time Teenie looked at Peg, she thought of a daisy with the eyes of a violet and the sweetness of arbutus. Why, the colleen's hair alone with its glowing sunshine was enough to light up any sort of face.

Teenie didn't go back to her hospital. Oh, yes, she did, but it was only to collect her belongings. Raymond Sloupsky disappeared at the same time, and Peg was the first to know

why. He left a letter for her. Teenie's dream had become a reality. She wasn't a skylark that must to find happiness fly to the sun; she was a little sparrow that could find joy on a lowly bush. She'd never read Chesterton, never heard of him and never would, but she was the kind he describes: "A wife varies as medicines vary with the disease. She has to be an optimist to the morbid husband; a salutary pessimist to the happy-go-lucky husband." The morbid soldier, Teenie's first choice, would have none of her, so she accepted the happy-go-lucky, and Raymond didn't really know yet how lucky he was to get her.

Raymond could speak English very well, but he was sadly at sea when he wrote it. However, since the young gentleman made his meaning very clear, what matter? Many cleverer writers are obscure; even Henry James is, and aren't parts of the Bible? The letter was scrawled on lurid stationery which would remind of Raymond's shirts; pink paper with a blue border and gold edging. It came in the ten cent store at thirty cents a box.

"Deer Peg: I couldn't faze you and say this stuff, so I've wrote it. That's easier on me, whatever about

you. I have fell in love again; this time with Teenie Cope. And she fell in love with me when I had your mother's apron on. It was my trueso done it. She says I have a trunk like a big white elephant or something. Of course, her being a nurse woman, she'd know if a man was built proper about the breast-bone, wouldn't she? At first she didn't show no love, but you learned me a good lesson. Never ask no woman for no kiss; up and take it off her. Then if she don't fall for your breast-bone or something, give her up and leave her go. It ain't fair to trouble no girl that don't want a fellow; ain't life hard enough on poor girls? I watched my chanct and gives Teenie a good one under the cherry tree. And it was by the moon, so I could see plain enough if it took. I gives it to her like that guy in the movie who had the big nose. And she did like that one he kissed. She flippered her eyelids, clutched out like she was gassed, and rolled up her eyes. I remembered the movie. So I ups and gives her another one. That finished her off. I had Teenie.

"Teenie's a Kathlict. She converted herself out of some church that she went onct a year. So we'll be married of the Church. The next operation for this here little nurse to faze is matermony. You told me you'd like me for a brother. Well, I'm feeling toward you like a sister now. And some day Teenie and me will come and pay you and mother no visit. Teenie told me all about Frank Snow. That poor guy

sure had a hard time of it with the shell shocks and such stuff. She said he sot like a stone, and then a blot of lightning socked him hard on the back porch and cured him up. I forgot two of my silk shirts in my burow drawer. Give them to Frank with my good wishes.

"And I owe you something for showing me how to make love, as well as for all your kindness. So I'm leaving you my little flivver, Leaping Lena. Don't call me extravagating; you always did. I got that cuckoo for $35, but ain't she worth her weight in gold! Gosh, she did the hills anyhow. Look how quick she went to the lawsuit of Nicholas and Rose. I wonder if Teenie will ever have a lawsuit with me? I wouldn't care if she pasted me with her fist. But wasn't it good I had a trueso!

"Your respectively, Raymond Sloupsky."

Peg nearly fainted with laughter. Then she took the letter and herself to her room, and pondered over the cue Raymond had given her. Take your lover unawares! Why not? Frank Snow's eyes told her a lot of things when he wasn't conscious. Perhaps now he was shell shocked by herself. Then he needed another stroke of lightning. She'd give it to him, but how? One thing, she must get out more alone with him. Absence might make the heart grow

fonder, but not till a man was married to you. Too much adoration from the virgins in this house. Violet McDannell was getting better, probably despairing, but Sara Barry was getting worse. Sara chanted *In the Gloaming* a lot these days. Perhaps, though, Sara was studying Frank to do in a story, but Sara did stare at him like a dove that was going to die. However, Peg decided in that hour both ladies were an absolutely unnecessary distraction.

CHAPTER XI

VIOLET was always complaining about her health, and Sara Barry was really worried about the poor thing. Maggie herself wasn't.

"A yowling cat do have nine lives, and is at everybody else's wake," said that good housewife sourly to Andy. "I'm waxing aweary of that woman, I am that. I can see she don't like Peg much, and the child run off her two feet waiting on her, and she's not fond of Frank Snow no more. Wouldn't it be grand if she'd pack up and git herself out of here!"

The soldier observing the big jolly Sara, thought of a large and rotund angel cake. Violet looked more like a deviled crab. She was all straight lines: straight, thin brows; too long, thin, straight nose; straight little lines in her cheeks; straight, thin lips, narrow, straight-lidded eyes. Sharp was the word to describe her and her looks; the eyes, the nose, the face—the tongue! The air of innocence she assumed when she met him didn't fool Frank in the least; it was too conspicuous. When she fussed

about him, she was more like an iced glass of unsugared lemonade than a good foamy bumper of Maggie's beer. There was nothing in that woman surely ever to warm a man's heart. Even the ladies' voices were diverse. Violet's sounded like the thin piping of the little bantam cock; Sara's like the lusty crow of the monster plymouth rock that was lord of the barnyard. In vocalization Violet was an unpleasant treble *piano,* while Sara was the contralto *fortissimo.*

"Violet's got into her head that she has ptomain poison," said Peg to her mother.

"Well, let her go to Righter's Tunnel and see the toe doctor, is all I can advise her," burst out Maggie, whose patience was nearly exhausted with her fretful porcupine boarder.

Peg laughed and explained to her mother what the sickness was. That only provoked Maggie the more.

"As if I'd cook anything to give her a pain in the foot or anywheres else! Did you have any signs in your stomach?"

"Oh, she won't stay here forever," encouraged Peg, "so we'll make the best of it and humor her. All three of us girls are going to swim over there in the mine breach this after-

noon. I'd better take a tire off the Ford as a life preserver, but Sara says she'll watch me."

"And where would you ever get a bathing suit, tell me?"

"Violet will lend me one of hers."

Maggie broke out laughing and held her sides. "You in her suit! Your father's foot in one of my stockings! I'll have to see you in that garb."

"It won't matter; nobody'd ever see us."

So the ladies spent an hour under the overhanging bushes and made mermaids of themselves in the cool yellow water of the big mine breach. Violet brought along her camera and took Peg's picture in the first and only bathing suit the colleen ever wore during her lifetime. Violet developed the picture: a timid nymph girl girt pretty much in sunshine, posing coyly against a background of huckleberries. Maggie with a shudder of horror opened the stove and to Peg's relief the snapshot curled up in the fire.

"Peg! if your father ever seen that, he'd be the death of us all. He's like all the Irish about the modesty of their women."

Violet sniffed with badly hidden contempt, but Sara was very sober. "You shouldn't have

taken that picture," was the novel lady's cold comment.

Maggie and Peg forgot the incident, but the mother warned her daughter to go no more to the water with "that one." "Let her go by herself, and if she drowns, that will cure all her ills and ptomain pizen. I hope she's in the state of grace when she goes. If she stays much longer, I won't be."

Violet when she first came, had been careful and made herself fairly agreeable. Then she grew careless and didn't seem to mind whose feelings she hurt wantonly. Now she was growing defiant, like one with a chip on her shoulder. Maggie read her well enough, and understood there'd soon come a quarrel and belike a hot and heavy one. Maggie didn't like quarrels, but she wasn't going to let that cat scratch anybody under this roof, and certainly not the boy who suffered in that murdering war.

Violet and Sara went off in the jitney over the mountain to Righter's Tunnel to a millinery sale. Maggie sighed with relief. She thought the nurse was getting fresh clothes for her departure to her home in Philadelphia. But she found to her grave concern that this seem-

ingly uneventful trip caused her and Peg no end of embarrassment. In fact, Maggie never got the thing quite out of her system.

At the evening hour the two ladies returned from their shopping expedition in new hats, and while Maggie didn't tell them, she did know the bonnets made the pair of them look worse than ever. She feared that each had picked a hat in pure spite for t'other. Violet's creation came down low on one brow and gave her left eye a sinister appearance—"as if the divil was squinting in the desert," thought Maggie. The tired drab face of the wearer seemed drabber and more tired under the white and black crown. Something too youthful about the hat made Violet's face older; too many lights above the shadows on the face. In truth with its row of emasculated feathers around it, the bonnet did remind of a frosted birthday cake with the ghosts of innumerable candles: that on the skull of a woman who no longer had birthdays. The two deep horizontal lines in her forehead seemed to come from the fact she was supporting that hat with her eyebrows.

Sara swept in with the rush of a summer gust and caused the little white half-curtains

to flutter. She postured with the grace of a glazier for Maggie to admire her headpiece. Maggie didn't admire; she marveled! A large cylinder crown with a small rim to which clung two feeble pale bunches of pansies, making a futile effort to climb up the dome. The odd twisted design on the front made of linked bits of tin and glass looked like a coiled tapeworm. Maggie liked Sara too well to express her opinion honestly, but she told Andy the hat gave her ptomain pizen in the lungs from not laughing out loud.

No, Maggie couldn't forget the twin helmets, nor could she ever put out of her mind what that trip brought forth. A veritable little cyclone of scandal hit the chaste portals of her home. It was Andy who first found it out, as he always got the evening paper read before his two women were done with their supper dishes. Peg and Maggie were at it, the mother doing the drying, when Andy leapt up in his socks with a roar.

"Did a hot coal hop out of the stove on to your poor foot?" queried Maggie anxiously. "They do fly sometimes."

Violet was rocking like a gorged snake in the next room, nursing gas on the stomach—she

invariably over-ate—and she heard everything.

" 'Tisn't me foot," exclaimed Andy. "It's *this!*" and his furious finger shook in the face of a half-tone on the front page.

In Righter's Tunnel, it developed, a beauty contest to discover the local "Miss America" was inaugurated. Photographs of the reigning belles of the county were submitted; and the paper said it was quite evident that Miss Peg Cleary of modest little Coaltown patch would be chosen for the queen of the pageant. Whatever about Coaltown's modesty, there was certainly nothing modest about the lovely colleen wearing that well-nigh invisible bathing suit. She could hardly have approached Mother Eve more closely in attire and got by the censors.

Andy had never chastised his daughter even in her earliest childhood; that was Maggie's prerogative. He knew Maggie wouldn't spare her if Peg was ever disobedient. But Andy now in his blind rage and humiliation made a leap for his poor hapless child, caught her by the shoulders, and shook her till Maggie screamed he'd break the girl's neck. Peg never before had occasion to learn how strong a man her father was. Now she was simply nothing in

his hands. The pain and surprise of his attack were so stupendous that before she knew it she cried out piercingly.

Maggie's cry echoed by Peg brought Frank Snow flying downstairs into the kitchen. He thought one or other of them had perhaps caught fire at the stove. He stood astounded, while Violet smiled sardonically in the doorway—"like a gleam of sunshine on the face of a corpse," Maggie put it. Peg had reeled away from her infuriated father, and was standing flat against the wall, her eyes closed, her hands outspread on the wainscoting.

"A soldier, it seems to me, ought to rescue that poor child from that old brute," goaded Violet in a hissing, queer voice. "Such cruel and barbarous treatment! He ought to be clapped into jail."

Frank stood foolishly in the middle of the room staring at Andy who was still blinded with rage. At Violet's words, Maggie came out of her petrification. She plucked the paper from her husband's hand and jumped at the right conclusion. She swung furiously on Violet, her gentle face distorted with resentment.

"Andy! Peg's innocent of all this thing. She

didn't know no more about that picture in the paper nor you did, and she ain't even saw it yet. That—that sarpint done the whole thing. She took the picture and I burnt it, but she kept a copy, 'tis evident."

"You should be proud of your daughter's beauty," declared Violet sweetly, though her voice sounded like a violin out of tune. "Frank, being a soldier, ought to be a good judge; show it to him."

Maggie opened the stove, and a blaze like temper came up out of the lid. On the narrow bench stood the drinking water in a bucket with a long-handled dipper. It floated invitingly on the surface and prodded Maggie's elbow. "If the holy water missed such a mischief-maker in baptism, this won't!" Quick as a streak of lightning, the flouted mother emptied a teeming dipper into Violet's face.

With a feline shriek, Miss McDannell rushed out into the night and the garden. In a minute after shrilled another screech, this time of acute agony. She'd fallen headlong into the clump of rose bushes, and the thorns did their worst through her thin waist and stockings. Andy now ashamed of his own impetuosity, didn't know what to make of his wife's. Maggie

with her face again gentle, turned to Frank who still stood like a schoolboy.

"God love you," said she. "Soldiers are to rescue ladies; you'd better go and save that one before she's ru'ned entirely."

Frank was glad to get the invitation, for he was scarlet with embarrassment, and he was afraid to glance at the humiliated little girl over against the wall. He bore the red-penciled form of the nurse in by the side door, and didn't like to look at the myriad scratches on her face and hands. He glanced into the kitchen as he passed, and saw Andy with Peg in his arms, his bearded cheek against hers, and Peg sobbing. In that moment, though the boy didn't yet fully know Violet's iniquity in the case, he hated the woman in his arms for whatever it was she'd done. He opined Miss McDannell owned the woody heart of a too mature radish.

But Violet didn't hate Frank now. She'd never been carried by a man before and most likely never would again. She clung to him, and as he set her down in the hallway at her own door, she grabbed his head and pressed her dry, cold lips on his. He incontinently reverted to his school days and drew his sleeve

across his mouth, for he tasted lipstick. But Violet didn't see his gesture of disgust.

Maggie listened with satisfaction to the sounds of a trunk being dragged across the floor; the unmistakable echoes of packing. Tomorrow would take the hussy hence, good riddance! Sara out walking in the moonlight, begging the stars for new inspiration, was in blissful ignorance of the whole affair. And yet that muddle would brighten life for the novelist lady herself. It is indeed an ill wind that can't blow a blossom in somebody's road.

CHAPTER XII

Peg was a born chauffeuse. She could turn round on a ten cent piece, and while she couldn't repair a tire, Frank Snow could, so she saw no reason why she shouldn't take him out for the air in Raymond's Ford, since the soldier wasn't taking her. Lesser things than muddy little runabouts have turned the current of a life, and later Peg often thought of that.

None had been more indignant about the pictured injustice done little Peg by the Righter's Tunnel newspaper than Sara Barry. She wouldn't even bid Violet McDannell goodby when the nurse left in the morning for Philadelphia. Violet minced up to kiss her erstwhile friend adieu, only to look up at a tip-tilted chin, in fact a couple of them, and to get a view of a long back as Sara haughtily stalked off.

"Oh, let's forget Violet," said Maggie; "we'll let that fly stick to the wall."

"Ye women folks can't never get along nohow," disparaged Andy. "Twelve scoop shov-

els can work together in harmony, but two needles must be kept apart."

" 'Tis yourself should know a thing or two about needles now, after you annexing one by setting on a mended shirt," Maggie spoke quickly.

"Needles and pins, needles and pins," hummed Andy; "when a man marries his trouble begins."

"So do a woman's," corrected Maggie, "only hers has no end here or hereafter. Her life ain't no heaven on earth and she'll have a terrible purgatory."

"As for Miss McDannell," Sara glowered, "punishment enough for that minx. She's on her way back to Philadelphia, where she hates to live. Listen," the novelist read from a book of essays she had: " 'The streets of Philadelphia are broad and straight. The Quaker City was always a wearisome place to me. Its rectangular avenues—so wide that they afford no protection from the wintry blast nor shelter from the canicular sunshine, and as interminable as a tale in a weekly newspaper—tire me out. They make me long for something more social and natural than their straight lines. Man is a gregarious animal. It is his nature to

snuggify himself. But the Quaker affects a contempt for snugness, and includes Hogarth's line of beauty among the worldly vanities which his religion obliges him to shun. Every time I think of Philadelphia my disrespect for the science of geometry is increased, and I find myself more and more inclined to believe the most unkind things that Lord Macaulay can say about Mr. Penn, its founder.' " Sara snapped the book shut. "But I'm not through with that beauty contest, not by a dern sight, no, ma'am."

Maggie wondered why Sara took so much time dressing not only her figure and her head but also her face. Was the novelist going to enter the beauty contest herself? She had a *fat* chance of winning! Maggie in redding up Violet's room found the nurse had left behind a jar of cold cream with the porcelain lid broken. Maggie slid that aid for the complexion on to Sara's bureau. Now Sara called her, and Maggie was astounded to see that Sara had three little scratches on her cheek. Sara had been massaging her sallow face with the cream, only to discover there were bits of broken porcelain in the perfumed grease.

"Musha," said Maggie, "I might a knew there was something wrong with that, or Violet wouldn't a left it behindst her. She do scratch us even after she's went."

However, the damage to Sara's pulchritude was slight. So off to Righter's Tunnel fared the noble Sara in her hat that would stop a locomotive. She with the glory of Judith of Bethulia about her, went to Squire Krepps, and he at once cancelled all his other engagements. They imbibed a glass of beer together in his private room. Like Holofernes, he poohpoohed prohibition, and had been unanimously elected on the Democrat ticket. He complimented Sara on her gorgeous hat, averring it went well with her style. Sara at once accepted another glass of beer.

He escorted Miss Barry to the newspaper office, and saw to it that the editor printed on his front page a formal apology to Miss Peg Cleary, also an explanation that said lovely young flapper had not herself sent in her decidedly *outré* photograph. In a word, that modest young person had been "done dirt." However, that didn't prevent fan mail showering in on poor Peg; even proposals of mar-

riage—though she got no such proposal from Frank Snow.

The squire, his duty done by Miss Cleary, now focused his full attention on the resplendent Miss Barry. He certainly did prettily by her. He took her to dinner in the most fashionable restaurant Righter's Tunnel boasted, and to say that Sara enjoyed herself is putting it mildly. What a goad a man's admiring eyes can prove to a woman's appetite. Squire Krepps concluded that Miss Barry was a decidedly healthy woman. She ate more than he did, and he was no vegetarian to pick and find flaws in a rare T-bone steak.

Then the merry big pair of them went off to the matinee, and during the feature picture the squire's paw groped over and captured Sara's plump white hand. She made no demur. From under the sick pansies on her hat, her eyes sparkled like rain-douched bluebells and her mouth flowered into a honeysuckle. The squire forthwith lost all further interest in the film.

Sara, all keyed up, forgot to remove her headpiece.

"Shoot that hat!" bawled a tormented fan who couldn't sight the drama on the

screen. "Holy sailor, we didn't pay two bits to look at a Polish wedding on a woman's skull."

The squire leapt up in mighty fury and his dragon eyes spouted fire. He was recognized forthwith—the judicial terror of Righter's Tunnel. One girl swallowed her gum, and the bawler gulped down his cud of tobacco. Sara graciously removed the offending bonnet and smiled into her defender's eyes.

Afterwards he guided her to his home, and showed her a splendid house that needed only a mistress to make it complete. Sara had dreamed of houses like this one, laid out without order or foolish architecture, where there was plenty of room and comfort. But it was the narrow hallway downstairs she always remembered best. That was the spot where the squire clinched her. Really he had her cornered there. If Sara struggled, she'd have upset the hatrack, but as it owned a mirror that would readily break, Sara didn't struggle. And that time he didn't kiss the ink-smudged finger of her plump white hand.

The squire brought her back to Coaltown in his car, and Maggie insisted himself stay for supper, after which Sara would sing *In the*

Gloaming, but an ill-timed 'phone message summoned him hastily back to his native heath. It was a marriage license and needed at once, if not sooner. When he got that peremptory command, he arose with full dignity, apologized to Maggie and glanced with a real man's appreciation at Sara who was coyness itself.

"If it was anything but a marriage, Mrs. Cleary, nothing would tear me away from your supper and Miss Barry's music, be sure of that. Her speaking voice is like Schumann-Heink's."

The squire didn't know that Mme. Heink's speaking voice is rather unpleasant, nor did Sara, so his compliment took.

"Safe journey, Squire!" replied Maggie beaming.

When Sara accompanied the squire out into the seductive night, Maggie sensed there was more in the wind than friendship. But she didn't know that the majesty of the law caught Miss Barry under the cherry tree, just as Raymond Sloupsky did Teenie Cope, and delivered her such a smack of a kiss (not on the knuckle) that three birds nesting above flew out of the branches, and Sara walked all over the onion bed fanning herself. The young Pole needed

a moving picture to show him how to capture a woman, but the middle-aged German didn't. Your widower can give the stripling pointers on conduct in many directions. Young men think old men fools, and old men know young men to be so. Your young men see visions, but your old men have dreamed dreams, and hasten betimes to make those dreams come true. Procrastination is the prerogative of youth, and golden days are squandered. One hoards as the days become hours that quickly fade to gray.

Sara religiously kept the conversation away from Squire Krepps, which, of course, only deepened Maggie's suspicions. Miss Barry spoke at some length of a dramatic act and a vaudeville turn that were holding forth at the movie house. "The three actors were splendid, really extraordinary," said Sara, "and so was their act, unusually so. The dancing vaudeville didn't appeal so much to me, to be sure, though that went bigger with the audience."

Peg couldn't understand why good actors would come to Righter's Tunnel, a small mine town, so Sara hastened to explain. "You see it's the lean time for actors, the summer months, and the histrions are hard put to get

their coffee and cakes. Really that little company is made up of three stars; such perfect articulation, such well timing of points, such perfect elocution. It doesn't really belong in such a theatre, of course, but what a treat to find it anywhere! And to think the vaudeville was featured and those legitimate actors weren't; not even a program to find out their names. It's what I'd call writing your fame in coal dust."

Peg, who loved stories, whether in print, in film or in flesh, decided Frank Snow should take her to tomorrow's matinee, since the mines would be idle again—which really meant that she would take him.

"Oh, do keep your word," she pleaded when she saw his badly hidden reluctance; "do take me, Frank. You just dare to back out now! You know I'm quite heartbroken since Nicholas and Raymond have left us. You're my lone rock of masculine entertainment now. And after the show we can drop in to see Nicholas' baby heir."

"I'd rather, Peg, take you to just the pictures. I put down the curtain on my last show about half a dozen years ago. But since you want to see that little play, you'll see it."

After dinner away shot Peg with the whole world in her runabout. Her high spirits communicated to Frank as the brave little "Leaping Lena" climbed up the steep mountain, then glided down the other side; around two bad curves which Peg took very well; down, down to the great sprawling breaker on their left, the high green woods on their right; down to the mule stable where the water purled into troughs for those patient hybrids; on through a string of little houses into the town.

The houses were ugly but their gardens were beautiful, made sweet by the hands of the miners' women. Hollyhocks along the fences, tall like Sara Barry, but much more angular, looked like elderly heiresses that the bachelor bees were wooing only for their wealth. Sickly phlox, white and blue, the soil not being so good for them. Currant bushes with plenty of pretty leaves but few berries. A peach tree growing near a bakeoven, seemed annoyed by the smoke that came pouring out into her head. Clothes-lines everywhere with long poles holding them up, and union suits flying awkwardly in the wind like decapitated gentlemen. Here was a whole family represented, held to the rope by clothes-pins; from

papa all the way down to a little one's very tiny socks.

The girl in the ticket booth cast an admiring glance at the tall dark young man who gave her the fifty cents, and the boy collecting the pasteboards at the door cast a bold look upon the fair red-haired girl. The music was as bad as they expected, and the picture was whirling to a close. Then a card was shot out on the side and Peg felt a thrill as she read: *Margery Rambell and Co.*

Two men were discovered at curtain rise. The plot developed quickly in this condensed melodrama, for the whole piece had to be finished in eighteen minutes. Then entered the "woman in the case," the adventuress. Peg caught her breath when she looked at that tall, slim, swift, graceful figure, wrapped in a heavy trailing cloak. The cloak soon was discarded to reveal a shimmering, flimsy evening gown. Oh, that dazzling yellow hair and those great penciled eyes with their unnatural lashes!

Peg didn't know a hoot about elocution, having never recited more than eight lines of poetry on Friday afternoons at school, and sometimes even then she got stuck and had to

be prompted, but she was woman enough to observe that Margery Rambell was certainly old enough to know all about her art. Still she wasn't supposed to be a flapper in this piece, but Peg, since the lights were bright and her seat 'way down front, noticed the little bags at the elbows and the hollows in the neck, which even under its make-up was that of a middle-aged woman. This dashy, sparkling creature must certainly be as old as her mother. But the actress' figure and face were those of a young girl, and oh, joy! what a silken, caressing, magnetic voice! It stirred the mine colleen to the soles of her little feet.

The carefully played act ended in a hush, which told that even that low-brow audience was affected. A girl whom Peg had heard chewing gum behind her stopped with her mouth agape during the playlet, but as soon as the curtain fell, the click-clack started again. There was no tableau; no time for it. This theatre furnished moving pictures and vaudeville and legitimate drama for two bits and gave all three in unbroken succession; continuous performance. You could come or go, there was always something doing. The footlights died and the house lights flared up for a min-

ute, while the girl at the piano let loose a fusillade of jazz.

"Speech!" cried an enthusiastic fan. "Encore!" That cry echoed through the house and applause followed, Peg herself assisting. She did want to see again that beautiful actress, Margery Rambell, for the act was hers and hers alone. The men were only "feeding" her; she was the star without doubt. Peg glanced at Frank to see how he was taking it, and was stunned at his ghastly face. The dramatic skit had nothing about war in it; why should be feel it so keenly? Then she looked quickly back at the stage. Margery Rambell had come forth to bow her thanks, and suddenly Peg understood that woman was tired and sick, so tired she couldn't hide it, and had a little cold, for she coughed.

"Speech!" yelled the fan, who perhaps wished to "razzle" the legitimate actress; it was nothing unusual here to do so. "Speech!"

The woman bowed again with a sweet smile, and her gratified eyes swept the front of the brilliantly lighted house. Then Peg felt the terrible change come into her companion. His eyes were riveted on the actress, as hers were on his. An unhealthy light was shining out from

between his lids, his teeth were clenched and his drawn-back lips showed them. His hands gripped the seat and one was unconsciously making mush of Peg's fingers.

Miss Rambell had graciously delivered a few well turned sentences and was just cracking a snappy little joke when she stopped. Peg saw the poor woman was terribly excited about something. She paused, stammered, clutched wildly at nothing, then made an abrupt, awkward bow and backed off, bumping into the tawdry scenery.

"Come back and give us the rest of that speech, Marg!" bellowed the coarse voice in the audience. But Miss Rambell didn't return. Out galloped the vaudeville dancers.

"You're sick," whispered Peg to Frank. "Come on home."

"No, no; you haven't seen the buck and wing and the feature picture yet." He sat as if made of ice and iron. The dancers did their turn and escaped into the wings.

Then Peg got to her feet. "I couldn't enjoy the picture with you looking like this," she informed him in a low tone. "Come right home with me this minute."

She was in the aisle before he could remon-

strate. At the door was one of the stage hands watching keenly every face that left. Frank understood in a flash why that man was there; he'd been sent. But Peg didn't understand.

The fellow saluted her and stammered a bit as he asked: "Are you one of our town girls, Lizzie Quinn, young lady?"

"No indeed," flashed back Peg, not catching Frank's warning glance, "I live over the mountain at Coaltown. My name is Peg Cleary."

"Oh, now I know you; you're Miss Cleary whose picture was in the newspaper. Your photo doesn't do you justice."

Peg reddened up to the rim of her hat. The man bowed gallantly and sped back to the stage door at the rear of the house.

CHAPTER XIII

PEG started the flivver and was making her way to the outside of the town, with Frank sitting like a stone image at her side. He said the air revived him, so they might as well see Nicholas' baby. She shot along the trolley tracks for a rough, loud mile on the way to the Dobberstein domicile, when Frank asked her to shut off the power. They were on the top of a little hill that was crowned with laurels, green and glorious. Down below was a large mule stable, a wire-roped yard and a dam. From the mountain above flowed a brook of silvery water that filled the bath pool of the mules. Six of them were splashing about in the cooling water.

"You didn't get much pleasure out of Righter's Tunnel this trip," said Peg pityingly.

"No, Peg. I spent six years in this town since two-thirty this afternoon. Now I've got to tell you my secret, for you'll soon find it out elsewhere. Violet McDannel thought I was

married to Teenie Cope or something, as she hinted to you, so Violet brought Teenie on."

"Good thing for Teenie, wasn't it?" chirped Peg cherrily. "She captured Raymond. Good thing for me too; she took Raymond away who was making rather a nuisance of himself to me."

Frank was loath to tell the horrible truth and was now killing time, as one puts off a painful surgical operation.

"He won't make a bad husband with a wife like you or Teenie to guide him. I advised you to get married to Nicholas before I knew he had a wife, but Raymond would make a good husband too."

"I wouldn't marry either of them in a hundred years," said Peg rapidly. "Why bother about them?"

"Because I knew either would make a very decent husband, and it's of prime importance for all of us to get just the right sort of mate. Marriage is a life contract, no getting out of it, so it should start right. And your dad did like them both."

"A pity dad couldn't marry one of them or both of them himself," replied Peg sharply.

"You're a mighty pretty girl, Peg, a beauti-

ful girl; really almost too lovely to be roaming free and foot-loose. Sweet songbirds like you have often been caught in a trap." He paused, and she noted his cold, hard eyes sweeping the soft blue sky, but she knew he never saw it. He was looking at something from memory; something decidedly unpleasant. "Violet McDannell's woman's instinct told her I was a married man. She picked the wrong woman; that's all. But I *am* married. I was trapped when I was about your age. Now you know at last why I wanted to save you."

"Frank, you're never married?" in a low tone of fright.

"Yes, Peg, I'm married all right or all wrong; fast and hard for life; it was done properly. Married when I was nineteen, a boy trying to coax along his earliest mustache, to Margery Rambell whom you saw this afternoon. She came to a large town where I was staying. She was doing Shakespeare and Ibsen in her repertoire, and as you saw, is a splendid actress. Why she's in this cheap little company now I can't make out. I thought her wonderful then, as you evidently think her now."

"But she's not young; she's nearly as old

as my mother," protested Peg in a squeaky mouse-like voice.

"I went mad about her. There's always something about a woman of her stripe to draw men."

"You were hardly a man then," Peg rushed to his defence.

"I believe she fell in love with me; I had good cause to think she did. What did I know about her? I married her, lived with her three months, traveled with her company as stage carpenter. Found out a lot of horrible things about her, unmentionable escapades. One of her great weaknesses was a perpetual craving for liquor and the wrong sort of companions. No self-respecting man could ever endure Margery. So I promptly left her. The war was at its thickest. I enlisted and had the good luck to be pushed to the front trenches, but the bad luck to come back shell-shocked. I was hoping, praying God some other boy with more to live for would be spared, and I'd take the bullet meant for him. That was five or six years ago. Really I can hardly reason right now; my brain doesn't click properly since I saw her again. I thought never to meet her in future; was really ducking and dodging her. I felt

sure she'd never locate me in a little patch like Coaltown."

"She certainly saw you and knew you too," said Peg. "That's why she was so good in her act and bad in her speech. She'd have been bad in the act, had she seen you first. Oh, forgive me for telling!"

"What?" he looked at her with vague, dull eyes.

"That's why that stage man asked me where I lived. *She sent him!*"

"You're right. I know Margery. She swore to me the night I left she'd follow me to the ends of the earth and urge her claims upon me. I'm her husband. She couldn't know where I was in France; perhaps she didn't know even that I went. I'll have to leave Coaltown." His head sunk down into his hands. "Oh, God, I hate to start rambling again away—away from you-r—mother! It's the only real taste of home I ever had. But I can't stand Margery; I won't stand her; couldn't meet her again. I'm almost afraid of her!"

"Where will you go?" asked Peg in a plaintive tone. Ah, that prospect! Days, months, years without a sight of Frank; perhaps her whole future life!

"Anywhere, just anywhere to escape her," was his spiritless reply.

"But couldn't you go to Raymond and Teenie, then later come back to—us?"

"You don't know Margery. If she once got the trace of me, she's like a bloodhound, and detectives nobody can hide from. You see the war was a blessing to me; it threw her off the scent. But you don't know Margery. No, I can never return to Coaltown, since she knows I was there."

There settled down a long silence, and both the occupants of the tiny car were thinking hard, though in different directions. The wind from the woods was sweet; the laurels swayed in its embrace. The water in the gully below was musical; the mules in the pond were merry. Peg was thinking back—back. Frank was thinking ahead—on, on.

"Frank Snow!" Peg was nervously, almost angrily whirling the driving wheel half-way round, then back again. Her slender foot was beating a tattoo on the emergency brake. He looked quickly at her. He had never heard Peg's voice like that before; cold, metallic, bitter, biting; old like a woman's who suffered; not the silver tones of a young girl. "Frank,

you made a mistake, as you say, when you got married to her. You made another mistake when you came from New York with me to Coaltown."

"What in God's name, Peg, was that mistake? I've made enough, I know."

"Was it quite fair of you to come with me and pass yourself off as a single man?"

"I didn't."

"But you see you did. Men don't wear rings nor take somebody else's name. You never told me—my father, for example, that you were married fast and hard."

"I didn't think he wanted to know. One man doesn't tell another man such secrets, but I think I hinted something to him. I'm sure I did."

"Most people can't take a hint."

"But Violet McDannell did; she suspected it."

"Oh, that screech cat! She didn't get any hint from you. You and Nicholas were low-spirited; about the same thing, it seems, your wives, though in opposite ways. Violet got the clew from him. You didn't give the proper hint; didn't do the proper thing. You should have told. In a word, you acted a lie."

"Peg! I lied! But never to your parents whom I adore and certainly I didn't lie ever —to you!"

"Yes, you lied to me. You lied and lied!"

"Peg!"

"Oh, stop Pegging me," she almost sobbed. "Do for God's sake, stop it! You lied with your eyes. We women aren't fools where men are concerned, even the greenest of us, and I'm no Solomon. Teenie told me she had been in love with you, and you up and ran away from her without even saying goodby. Why didn't you up and run away from me? That would have been very merciful to me. You showed her consideration; me none." He hung his head and she heard him gasp. She went on then. "You married for keeps to Margery Rambell; your wife before God and the world, no matter what she is or what she did or does; your wife even though she drank all the hooch in our poor blighted country; your wife even though she murdered President Coolidge— you, her husband, brazenly looked love which means marriage at another woman, who thought you had the right to look at her that way. I saw your eyes, and you're not blind enough not to have seen mine. It's the lan-

guage God gives poor human beings when their tongues daren't yet act. We both looked that language at each other. Answer me; am I wrong?"

"No, Peg, you're right. I've seen you cared, but I didn't know how much you cared. I did act the coward, because I wanted the home with you folks; because I wanted to hang close to where I could see you every day. It was all I had; nothing else to look forward to. To see you, to hear your voice, to know you were doing things for me——"

"Stop, Frank, for dear God's sake! Oh, do stop that sort of talk!"

"My lips were a man's lips that he can bite till they bleed; as I bit mine when I saw my buddies slaughtered in France, but I carried on. I spoke nothing that would lead you to think—but my eyes betrayed me. Great God, how treacherous our human nature is! And I'm only human."

"We're both only human," she echoed grimly, "both man and woman, and only human beings. After what you saw in the war, surely to God you understand what can happen poor frail flesh and blood. In the base hospitals did the boys look like human beings

made to the image and likeness of God? Weren't they just mangled up flesh and blood and bone? The war did that, and love can do worse; it can mangle an immortal soul."

"But—but, Peg, you're very young. There's hope for you, while there's none for me. There'll be other Junes, other summers when I pull away tonight."

"Never another June or summer for me, Frank, not forever more. A man like you has a fatal charm for us fool women. So fatal that dad's going to be disappointed always in me; for not this summer nor next summer nor all all the summers to come—I've given my poor gift away; gave it too readily, too gladly. Do you think—can you imagine that after my heart's gone, I'd curse any man in marriage by giving him the shell of my body; that I'd ever dare to bring little children to life for a man whom I could never love; that I could ever look those little innocents in the face? Oh, God, you do not know Irish women!" He laid his trembling hand on her wrist in appeal, for he couldn't speak, and his great black eyes were overflowing with misery. "Don't touch me!" she hissed. "Don't touch me! Remember we both have souls to be saved or damned!"

She jerked away from him, and her foot accidentally gave the emergency brake a kick. It slid forward with a snap, and the car started away down the hill. Peg couldn't see anything for the tears in her eyes, but Frank's soldier training stood him in good stead. If the car ever plunged down that cliff into the creek, they'd both be killed. For himself he didn't care, but Peg mustn't get hurt. He leaned over and gave the wheel a wrench and skirted the edge of the little precipice. He shot on the brake but it wouldn't hold. The car had too great an impetus. Like an arrow, the runabout flew—down the steep hill, through the creek, missed a huge rock by an inch, skidded in the mud and all but upset, then headed right into the mule dam. There it sank down into the ooze, the water rising above the carriage wheels. The hybrids with neighs of terror fled in all directions.

The dash through the air braced Peg. Their mutual safety all came of the man's keeping his head; she saw that. He was stronger and had more good sense than she. She leaped out into the water, sank to her waist, then went to the bank. Frank followed her. She climbed back up the little green hill, but found she was

quite exhausted; felt like lying down to die right then and there. She could never go to Nicholas and Rose in this highly nervous condition. She sat on the grass and tried to collect her thoughts.

Then she wondered what had become of Frank. She looked beyond the embankment and saw him standing like one dazed near the pond. There was something unnatural in his pose, as if a man were walking in his sleep or were half stunned. Fascinated she stared. She watched him turn from her, wade heedlessly through the inlet of the dam; go on and on.

He was trudging up a pile of cinders, a small mountain of them from the boiler-house, a thick mass of slate and coal burnt into sharp points. Down on the other side she saw that bank was hollowed out. The cinders were being carted away to make good, solid roads. She started to her feet. Something was seriously wrong with Frank. He'd walk over that edge and fall headlong down, down for yards among those razor-edged, jagged-pointed lumps. She winged down the hill again; ran back a distance, then made a mighty jump over the creek, and bounded up the bank of cinders in time to reach Frank on the verge.

She caught his arm, whirled him about and guided him back to safety.

Then she saw—oh, God! His mind, that poor mind that she herself had tortured within the past hour, as if the war hadn't tortured him enough—his mind was blank; the shell shock had returned!

Like a child, he tagged after her over to the creek, where she pushed him down on a great graveled stone. She racked her brain thinking what she should do. He sat there as if he were a part of the rock, and Peg paced up and down wringing her hands. Her mother had a deserved reputation as being a good one around the sick. What Maggie Cleary didn't know about sickness, said the neighbors, nobody but a very fine doctor could find out. Didn't Maggie save the life of little ones with diphtheria? When young Marie Henry stuck grains of corn up her nose, wasn't it Maggie's skilled fingers got them out? When a big bug crawled into Andy's ear as himself was asleep on the grass, and he awoke to execute a war dance with execrations and conjurations, didn't Maggie drown the intruder with warm water and then remove the pest with her hairpin?

Water! Peg was her mother's daughter.

She tiptoed over to the creek, looked about and sighted an old powder keg. It had a handle and very likely was used for the mules when the water was slack. She quietly filled the bucket in the stream, stole back unobserved by the man, and let him have the icy contents straight between the eyes. She emptied that bucket with all the strength of her slender but powerful arms. The douche was such a surprise and shock, also such a cataract that the soldier went backwards off the rock on the broad of his back and his two long legs flew up in the air. The wonder was he didn't turn a complete somersault. As it was he wrenched his neck a bit and got up rubbing it.

"God help us, Peg, was that a cloudburst?" He was dripping from head to foot, and his trousers had been quite wet enough before when he waded out of the pond. The girl could have clapped her hands in delight when she saw his memory had come back. How she blessed God in that moment! Then Frank swung on her with a slight, puzzled frown; he was scratching his head to remember. She saw that. "What—what happened, Peg?"

"What do you think, Frank?" She eyed him closely. "Leaping Lena got on a frolic and ran

away with both of us. Look where the little hussy landed."

"Oh, so that was it? I recall being shot off on a skyrocket or falling out of an airplane or something, and then the whole world went black, pitch-black, and something told me I was walking, walking, but my brain must have been numb, I think. Then came the cloudburst, and I tumbled down out of the sky."

The stable boss came frothing up the path. He couldn't imagine what had sent the mules scurrying hither and yon. Gipsy was over among the laurels kicking her heels high at fancied pursuers, her ears flat, her eyes dangerous; she looked hysterical. Quiet old Adam had his tail stuck out straight, and was walking round and round in a circle like a dog that wanted to lie down. Bess and Kate were biting each other savagely. When the boss spied the Ford in the middle of the pool, he held his sides and shook laughing.

"No need to tell me who was driving—you!" he pointed a finger that shook with merriment at Peg.

"The brake wouldn't hold," she explained, "and we came all the way down." Her hand traveling in a zigzag indicated the itinerary

from the hill above; the yawning precipice, the deep ditch, the big rocks, the stumps.

"It's beyond me how you get away with it." The boss shook his head. "Women and flivvers get by where men and real automobiles would be junked. That's a miracle. Oi, oi, what a nose dive!"

He asked Frank to help him round up the mules, and Peg with a long switch and much waving of hands and shooing assisted. Then Adam and Bess were hitched to the Ford, and Leaping Lena brought safely to the path. Nothing wrong with her, not even her coils damp. Peg all the while was studying Frank intently out of the corner of her eye. Just how much did he remember? She found what she hoped for; he didn't remember a thing—but oh, what when he did later on?

"We away over here?" he asked, rubbing his temples when she and he were in the flivver.

"Oh! We came down to see Nicholas' baby, but musha, we're not presentable now to behold any man's eldest son, are we? We'll have to come back. We'd better get home before dark. It's not unlikely sly Lena's got something wrong with her innards, and we might stall going up the mountain. Let's speed up."

Down by the stable whizzed Peg; up the township road. "Turn here into the good state highway," counseled Frank. But Peg didn't. That would take them by the theatre, and he mustn't be reminded of that and Margery Rambell, or tonight might be the last she'd ever lay her anguished eyes upon this man of men. Out of town at last, thank God! Bing! Peg went banging over the railway crossing at too great a clip and Frank bounced up in the air. He burst out laughing.

Then they were climbing as if into the heavens, up, up into the mountain, up nearer the sky, Peg thought, away from that theatre —she understood now why he hated plays and in this hour she did herself—up where the air was cooler, sweeter, piney, inspiring. She was at the peak of the mountain. Now she shot into neutral, and away slid Leaping Lena down nearer, nearer home. One night more he'd be under the same roof with her; one night more!

Maggie judged they'd have supper at Nicholas' and so had the table cleaned, but she rushed a scrap meal for them, while they changed their wet clothes, and Frank did the supper justice. The mother with anxiety noticed that Peg took only the coffee. Then the

girl explained that Frank had suffered one of his old attacks, and he'd better go to bed after he'd enjoyed a smoke with Andy. Maggie understood now why Peg was unnerved. She was seeing how much her girl was in love with this splendid fellow.

Sara Barry came out into the kitchen. She said she wanted to talk to somebody; her muse had deserted her; the springs of inspiration were as dry as the desert. Peg looking at the good-natured writer, thought what a story Sara could accomplish if she knew—if she knew.

"I'll soon be leaving you," said Sara. "I'm lonesome for New York."

"Wouldn't Atlantic City be nice at this season of the year?" queried Maggie slyly. At that Sara blushed up furiously. "I see by tonight's paper that Squire Krepps is going to vacation down by the sea."

Maggie knew that the majesty of the law had been talking this afternoon to Sara on the 'phone, and the conversation was a long one. Peg looking again at Sara, thought the writer was turning her back on a story that might have made her. But when a week later an almost maudlin letter winged in from Sara an-

nouncing she'd been married the morning before to Squire Levi Krepps in the St. Nicholas' Church at Atlantic City, Peg sighed. Sara had found her own love story by leaving.

Maggie had to laugh. "She was lonesome for New York, so she went to Atlantic City, and ain't that a good distance from New York? It's nice to know we'll have her near us."

When Frank was gone to his room, Peg took Maggie to hers, and the two women sat talking till all hours while the rest of the household slept. Maggie's heart was full of pity for Frank and Margery Rambell. She didn't say what she felt regarding Peg, but she did give her daughter subtle indirect warning.

"The poor actress, and don't the stage actresses, Peg, all have bitter hard times of it; this one picking at them; that one plucking their reputation! But she must love him a whole lot when she even got fussed up on the stage, for I read of one where her child was dying in the hotel, yet she went on the stage and did good that night, and everybody howling laughing at her. When Margery got mixed in her speech, which is one thing they don't never do nohow, that shows you how she cares, God

pity her and him both! . . . There's good news came to us this evening, which I wasn't sorry to get. The collieries are going to work full time starting next week, so we'll all be on easy street. Sara'll leave us and the two men and Violet are gone, so we won't have so much work to be doing. Sara said she really had to go out to get a fresh location and bird's-eye view or something; new scenes to give her aspiration. Her editors wanted her to write more gayer stuff and young people, and I guess up here we're a bit slow for the big popular magazines. Sara's been making a good bit lately, so I thought she could afford a hotel where them robbers charge two dollars a day for room and meals. With the work good, your dad will earn plenty and then Frank."

"But, mother, don't you see Frank will go too? The desolation of this big house!"

The mother's and daughter's eyes met and embraced, both blue, both full of hidden ache, and not another word passed between them regarding the soldier.

"Say your rosary and I'll say mine," was Maggie's parting injunction, as she kissed Peg and left the room on tiptoe to disturb nobody. But Maggie in her own room paced up

and down in her bare feet, her tears splashing all over the place. "God!" she was panting, "don't let my little Peg suffer! Give it to me as much as You like, lay it on hot and heavy, but oh, do spare her! She'll get woe enough of it before You take her. Who of us doesn't? But whatever Your wisdom sees fit to be doing, let no sin ever tarnish my little girl's life! I didn't raise her to offend You never. I've did me level best; I place all her future with You."

CHAPTER XIV

MARGERY RAMBELL was visibly agitated as she stood in her garish stage gown—the lace was faded, the white silk worn and frayed; that creation had once done long service in a city shop window till the sun blemished its splendor; then Margery picked it up cheaply —she stood at the door of her dressing room listening to the stage hand whom she'd tipped generously.

"Her name is Peg Cleary?"

"Yes," added the property boy, "I know them Clearys. Her father's big Andy and they live over there in Coaltown. It's just a patch, and they belong to the Mine Run parish, not this one."

Margery smiled a little to one side of her face at that. As if she knew anything about parishes! She was abstracted, but she answered the greeting of the cheap little dancing girl who was going toward the street: "Good afternoon, Miss Rambell!" Margery Rambell had a reputation all along the line of being a "good fellow." She was extravagantly generous with

her tips at the hotels, and year after year the bellhops and other servitors waited for her return. But of late she wasn't staying at the same hotels. Good reason; she could no longer afford it. Her star was setting.

Miss Rambell spoke to her leading man and her character actor. "As you know, we're laying off the next three days. It's awful hard to book these darn dramatic acts. Next Monday we open at Shenandoah, so you fellows can go on there if you wish or stay here at Righter's Tunnel."

"What are you going to do?"

"I—I'm not just sure. But I think I'll hang out here till Monday afternoon."

"Oh, for the love of Mike! In this dump! Gosh, Margery, what's got into you? This place would give me the heebie-jeebies."

"Shenandoah isn't much of an improvement," she countered.

"But anyhow, Margery, that town has a nicer name than this one."

"Boy," she chided lightly, "we got our full salary here, and anywhere I get my salary looks like New York to me. You are not yet a great artist, or you'd consider your pay-check first."

"Right-o, Margery," agreed the leading man. "You said a mouthful that crack." And he turned his cuffs inside out to show the clean interior. He wasn't wasting his money on a Chinese laundry, not he.

The jitney took Miss Rambell up the mountain, and she stopped at the top to fill her eyes with the grandeur of the woods. It was a long time since she'd been on a mountain. She didn't even know what the huckleberries were. She plucked a fistful of splendid ferns, the first time in her life she ever did so.

She stood by a little stream staring at her face distorted in the water. There was a rock, sad, worn, experienced in storms, looking ancient, with bitter secrets locked in its hard breast, the merry ripples beating about it. The smiles of the brook were reflected on the rock, and the rock's dull frown was duplicated in the water. The healthy young brook would have had a more cheerful passage, had that stony obstacle been removed. Margery chilled in the warm air at the comparison that flashed through her keen brain, then she turned her great eyes up to the blue sky where birds were sailing.

She was at last down in Coaltown, the first

time in twenty-five years she put her foot in a place that hadn't a theatre. She looked grimly at the little old red schoolhouse with the palings off the fence. Would that be her next arena? She was steadily declining. At the thought of herself lecturing with magic lantern slides, she repressed a laugh that escaped in a sigh.

Peg's heart was pounding and her fingers trembling the day after the terrible revelation. She went hurriedly to the kitchen door. Through the window she had seen an unmistakable blond woman, whom she could never forget, come up the garden walk and stare curiously at the hollyhocks as if they were total strangers to her career.

Then Miss Rambell was in the spotless kitchen. She at once thought of it as a unique "set" for a folk play. A collier's pick and big shovel, boots, overalls with a packet of *Miner's Extra* tobacco sticking out of the hip pocket. Perhaps those were *his*. Round about every indication of grimy toil; only brightened by love. The symbol of that stood there on the window-ledge in that little pink flower in a tomato can. Love, the one bright spot in a darkened life! After all what had any life but only

that—love? With love, rich; no matter what the world denied. Without love, poor and naked and wretched; no matter what the world gave one. Wasn't an apple for dinner in Provence better than a partridge in Paris?

Peg led the tall lady into the parlor, where it was cool and sweet.

"Delicious in here," said the low, husky voice, and she coughed a little as she accepted the best rocker that Peg pushed out to her. Peg noticing she had a cold put the blinds higher on the windows to let in more sunshine, for the room was delightfully cool. All the while the woman watched the graceful, beautiful child achingly. "You are the girl who was with Frank Snow at the matinee yesterday?" queried the actress, fixing her sharp steel-gray eyes on Peg's face to note if she'd lie.

Peg was studying her too. Miss Rambell was at once taken with this Irish colleen: eyes "infinite purities half-asleep in sweetest pearls." She knew the sort of laugh this girl would own:

> "So like an altar-bell that had you heard
> Its silvery sound a-ringing you would think
> Of kneeling down and worshipping the pure."

Peg on the other hand couldn't help remem-

bering the day she visited the miners' hospital and the horrible stench of iodoform pervading everything. She was almost sorry she'd brought so many roses; their perfume was certainly lost. But how one of the crippled boys clutched a pink bud and put it to his nostrils! This beautiful woman bore something unhealthy, unwholesome about her. Miss Rambell swung out of her light cloak, and suddenly Peg thought of Hawthorne's *Lady Eleanor's Mantle,* which carried the germs of smallpox to destroy everybody, even the beautiful Eleanor herself.

"Yes, Miss Rambell, I was—with your husband!"

"Oh!" that quite took the actress' breath. She hadn't expected Peg to be so abrupt. "So you know! He evidently told you. *When,* may I ask?"

"Yesterday after the matinee."

"You didn't know before that I was his wife?"

"I didn't even know he was married."

"I *see.* How long has my husband been here with you folks?"

"We run a boarding house, Miss Rambell. I met him accidentally in New York City

where he saved my life. I was down there with my aunt. Your husband rescued me when I was struck by a hit-and-run auto. He'd come from a soldiers' sanitarium where he'd been for a long time suffering with shell shock."

"Oh, my God!" the actress' thin hands went to her throat. Peg noticed her wedding ring. So she still wore that! "Was he in the war? Why didn't I think of that long ago? But I suppose I'm like all us women; we never picture horrible things unless they're flashed on us."

"Yes, he went through the whole war. His nurse was here from the hospital, and said his life was despaired of a dozen times. They couldn't wean him from the shell shock."

"But he finally got over it?"

"Not quite. It comes back now and then."

The actress dug out her handkerchief and wiped her eyes. "He knew me yesterday, didn't he?" Peg nodded affirmation. "May I ask what he said when you left the theatre?" Peg lowered her eyes, scraped with her toe on the rug and was confused. "Please do tell me," goaded the woman of the stage; "please do, child—*everything*." Peg raised dark-blue eyes

so full of misery that the quick intelligence of the actress understood. "You can't quite find the words, can you? Well, let me do it for you, and stop me when I'm wrong. Frank told you after the matinee I was his wife." Her attentive eye studied every expression of the colleen's mobile face. "You are in love with him." Peg made no attempt to deny. "How far has that love *between you* gone?"

"Never a word of love was said between us till yesterday," burst out the tortured girl. "Frank never in all his time said a word of love to me. But I often—you understand, Miss Rambell, saw his *hidden* love for me in his eyes when he wasn't watching himself."

"And he never really told you he loved you?"

"No, not till yesterday when I rebuked him for not having let me know he was married. When he was cornered like that, he admitted he loved me."

"*Just like him!* I knew he would never disappoint me!" There was a note of acclamation in the husky contralto tones. And the actress coughed again, this time more severely. "Go on and tell me what he said—about me."

"He said you would follow him; it was your way, and that you'd come here and reach him somehow."

"So then he's expecting me?"

"No. There is something I haven't yet told. After he confessed about being married to you, the shell shock came back on him." Tense agony drew the actress' face white in a mask. "For fifteen minutes he was a man without mind or memory. I was driven desperate to know what to do. So I emptied a lot of cold water into his face unawares, and that startled him back to consciousness. The way he was walking around as if blind he might have hurt himself. And when his memory returned, it came back only partially. He doesn't recall that he saw you in the theatre."

"And have you jogged his memory to bring me back to his mind?"

"No, Miss Rambell, I have not."

"And why not pray?" The actress was cold and stern and looked very old now.

"Because just before he got the attack, he said he would leave here; he'd have gone last night, had his memory stayed normal."

The actress softened as snow would under a beaming sun. "And you kept him here till

I could meet him! You gave me my chance—such as it is." Peg blushed and fingered her apron uncomfortably. "Tell me what you think about his health."

"In general it's the health of all young men at his age. The shell shock has been wearing away, and I'd say when it's stopped on him by a small remedy like a dash of cold water, it will soon leave him for good to return no more."

"Where is Frank now, Miss Cleary?"

Peg went to the door and hailed Maggie who was passing. She introduced Miss Rambell, and Maggie's quick, kind eye saw the actress was none too well herself.

"Himself and me husband are out picking coal, Miss Rambell—excuse me! Mrs. Snow! You know with the broken work we're enjoying up here, we have to watch our coppers."

The actress smiled a little wanly. "Lots of us have broken work these days, Mrs. Cleary, even some of us who don't pick coal. The hard times affect all us workers."

"I'll let Peg go out after him. You see she's lighter of the foot nor meself or a slim girl like you," Maggie's smile was like a welcome flood of sunshine in a sick-room, "and I amn't quite

sure on which bank they do be at this time of day." Peg sped away. Maggie looked at the actress' nice clothes and elucidated. "He'll be a sight with the coal dirt when he gets back, so belike I'd better be getting him a hot tub before he meets yourself. With them big hands on him he'd smear up all your dress."

"I don't think there's much danger of that, Mrs. Cleary," the actress sighed, trying to crush down the agony in her voice. "He won't kiss or embrace me."

Maggie lowered her lids and said nothing to that, but then she bethought her to encourage. "How do you know he won't? He's a different man since he came out of the war, and were you married before he went in?"

"Yes, married before he went to the war. Maybe that's why he went!" She couldn't keep down the agony.

Maggie hopped up on her heels. "I'll make you a dish of tea, and you set here and rest yourself till Peg finds him." Maggie looked about. "I could run upstairs and get you a nice *Ladies' Home Journal.*" The actress shook her miserable head. "But if you want funnies, you'll get more out of this." Maggie

with a laugh that was a trifle forced, put the family album into her hands. The actress thought Maggie's laugh was sunny-bright, sweet as a hymn. Surely these fine human beings, Frank's own type, were making things as easy as possible for her, Margery Rambell. They set the stage well for her; now how was the big act of her life to be played? What the denouement? "There's the whole rogue's gallery of me and Andy's race and a few more besides." And Maggie took herself off into the kitchen.

"This is far better than any magazine, Mrs. Cleary."

The actress held the heavy blue plush book reverently, her fingers caressing the German silver monogram before she opened it. What wholesome people; *his* kind of people! And hers? She shuddered and hastily parted the book. Here stared up at her a replica of the lovely Peg, only this woman was older. Oh, the hats of those days! A small crown and enormous brim and a long, long feather coiled all over the front. The lady wore a basque, and had one hand proudly laid on the shoulder of a sitting man—there was no doubt he be-

longed to her, and neither cared who knew it—and the other hand with the large wedding ring was flat on the lady's stomach.

Sad as she was, the actress permitted herself a little laugh at that pose, she who had posed so often herself before the camera. Even the photographers of those bygone days were different. Were we today so much wiser after all, as certainly we were no better? God, we weren't half so good as they, those early American pioneers of ours! She closed her eyes, for the lids were burning, and turned the befeathered lady over. She now lay on her face above two infants.

Gosh, what a lovely little crowing baby! That was Peg surely. The two tiny teeth in that pretty mouth, shining out a blessing to the man and woman who brought her to life. The actress hastily wiped a tear away before it burnt the page. Here on a tintype a man with a high hat and decorated with an A. O. H. baldric. What *did* A. O. H. signify? she pondered. Oh, his air; he looked as if he could play Hamlet! Here ladies with bangs cut saucer fashion and long earrings. On, on over the leaves to the end.

And here the man she adored: in the cocky

little cap, the buttons, the khaki, the puttees—a prince as a foot soldier, fighting for his country as a buck private, and she never, never knew! Fighting for the dear old flag, fighting for the good mothers like Maggie Cleary and the sweet, pure girls like Peg. And she never knew he was doing that. Had she any right to know? Was she, Margery Rambell, among the women worth fighting for? Wasn't she as selfish as sin itself?

She laid the book on the table at that photograph, as one would lay down the prized relic of a saint. Then she slid to her knees and put her aching head on the pictured breast. She fought back the tears; that picture must never be stained.

"My poor shocked soldier boy! The wife! then the war!"

She heard Maggie coming through the next room. With a lightning-swift thought, she plucked out the photograph of the soldier and thrust it into her bosom, where it warmed her heart. Maggie brought in the tea and a slice of cake. The actress was sipping when she heard the sound of heavy brogans on the porch.

"Belike that's him!" Maggie exclaimed, but it was only Andy.

Maggie introduced the unknown Mrs. Snow. Andy opened his eyes big and bowed low before this splendid vision, though he had an opinion which he well concealed herself was no flapper. She was forty if she was a day at all. The actress thought of a daisy as she looked at Andy's lively eyes and jolly countenance. Even the top of his head was like a daisy; a bald dome with fringed locks outstanding.

"Did you see Peg?" asked Maggie.

"I did not."

"Where's Frank?"

"He didn't seem to be none too well today, so I sent him off up to the spring for a good cold drink, and belike he's there yet."

At that moment Peg came back. In her agitation she almost upset a vase filled with daisies and ferns that stood on the table.

"Frank's up there on the hill, Miss Rambell. I'll show you, and there's a kind of woods behind—we call it The Grove—where you can talk."

The actress didn't finish her tea. She followed Peg through the kitchen, out and up the creaking old boardwalk, girt on either side by the flowers; through the squeaky, complaining gate; along a little path where the stream ran

deep—and then the girl indicated by a wave of her hand the man beyond.

"How did Frank seem?" asked Maggie in a whisper of Andy.

"He seemed to have something terrible on his mind; was like a man fighting himself. He looked desperate."

CHAPTER XV

Peg turned away from Margery without a word and with muted steps returned to the house. In her own room, sweet with the clover she had in a little jar, came a moment of darkness. She was standing there at the window but could see nothing. The big stable anyhow shut away from her, the trees would have too, the man and woman meeting up there in the wild glory of nature. The breaker, the boiler-house, the mountains, everything was lost to the poor little girl's vision.

She walked feebly to the little table that had the clover blossoms, standing there under the large picture of the Mater Dolorosa, that tragic, pitiful face with the tears pearling the worn cheek. She went down on her knees. How long she stayed there in that travail she never knew; never could remember. Surely an hour or more, for she was stiff when she got up.

She heard her door open, but felt sure it was her mother. The door closed again, and a man's hand fell heavy on her quivering shoul-

der. Then she started up to look through blurred eyes into the face of Frank Snow. Sparks were flying everywhere in that moment, thunders were crashing in her head. He caught her wrist, but no weakling, she wrenched herself away.

"Frank!" her tone was electric with horror and anguish. *"You in my room!* Oh, you have no right to do this! you have no right to be here at all! What would my mother and father think of you!"

"Yes, I have the right!" He came closer to her, and she backed away in terror into the most distant corner.

CHAPTER XVI

Andy and Frank Snow had struck a nice bed of coal in the culm bank and had a big pile of it ready for their bags. The wheelbarrows stood waiting like patient mules to have the sacks flung across their backs. You see in the old days the coal companies weren't so thrifty as they are now in our day of conservation. In this waste banks were tons and tons of real coal, big coal, that could be dug out and salvaged. Then at home in the shed Maggie or Peg or the men would crack it on a large flat stone with a heavy hammer.

Frank was feeling in fine shape; the weather was just right, though a little hot, and Andy joined in whistling with him. They were echoing a song that Peg and Maggie often sang. Then Andy saw Frank pause, as a jitney plodded slowly by through the ruts; understood that the soldier caught a glimpse of the occupant, and at once Frank's whistle died on a note. He leaned for a little while on his shovel. Andy saw his face grow a sickly hue,

and the sweat start to trickle down his temples and nose.

"You'd better quit," was the elder's advice. "Run up to the spring for a good fresh drink, then go back into The Grove, and stretch yourself out under the pines. Sleep if you can."

Frank turned rather blank-looking eyes to his friend, almost father, and lifted the barrow handles. He deposited his load at the house, then lagged up to the spring. There he sat on the mighty rock and his memory flooded back: the theatre; she, Margery Rambell, and she was here now at Coaltown. Oh, he knew her profile, her hair, and he knew her ways. Like a tigress she'd never give up anything unlucky that she had in her claws; her fangs would tear the heart out of her victim.

He heard her before he saw her, and his instinct told him who it was. Her high heels gritting on the walk warned him to run before she got too close, but he didn't run. He sat stupid and despairing there in the glory of a July afternoon. He raised his eyes, heavy with misery, to meet hers that were full of love and longing.

"So you've found me!" he said with bitterness.

"By chance, yes," she replied, "and how good it is to see you again! You were always good to look at, and you're going right on improving. I never thought men did. Oh, Frank, is that all you have to say to me—me who haven't seen you for a whole century?"

She glided close to him with that swimming gait she had. She gazed down into his face with the traces of coal dust about his lashes, as an actor might use blacking beneath the eyes, and the perspiration beading the roots of hair on his brow. She was so near he saw the rouge artistically rubbed into her cheeks.

"You're a man now, every inch a man," she went on musingly, proudly. "You were such a boy when I married you. The actors teased me about my kid husband; called me the cradle robber."

"You were a robber; you took a mean advantage of a dumbbell boy."

"Because I was madly in love with you, Frank."

"Does love excuse everything? And can women like you really love a man?"

She might have flushed, but the rouge on her face was very heavy. "Yes, women like me can

love—once, when they meet the right man. I met that man——"

"You mean that boy."

"Oh, you were just as big then as you are now. You were a man in build and strength and character."

"But really only a child in years, nineteen. I was hardly beyond the whipping age. Fathers sometimes lick nineteen-year-old sons, don't they?"

"I don't know. I—I never knew a hoot about my father. I met the right man at the wrong time. I was a wife three months, three golden months, and then—the curse of God should fall on the one who told you things that were dead, things I'd buried."

"You should have told me yourself before I took you to the priest."

"Then that priest would never have seen me."

"At least you should have told me after our marriage."

"And sent you from me forever? Some men might have forgiven me; you never would. It's a bad thing for men to be too good."

"Would you want men to be as bad as a lot of women; me as bad as yourself?"

"Oh, Frank dear!" She swooped with her arms outstretched to embrace him, but his capable hands caught her wrists, though not roughly, and held her at arm's-length away from him. "When I was trying to put that heavy act across yesterday to that low-brow audience—didn't I put it over, though?—something told me you weren't far away, and I wasn't surprised to come out and see you there before me. My speech was a mess, but my heart was in my mouth and my tongue was out of luck. And then it was so easy to find you here."

"Easy! that's just the word, Margery, easy! I was always, always easy; a good deal of a mush-head. That's why you spoiled my life."

"I'm not sure that I did. I married you——"

"I thought it was the man who married the woman."

"Men usually think so, but the women know better. He says the actual words, but she's really the prompter."

"So is the devil a prompter, a mighty good prompter."

"The devil had nothing to do with our brief, whirlwind courtship. It was all very innocent. Why, you made me feel like a guileless little

school miss. And as your wife I gave you three very happy months. You know it. Be gallant enough to say it, do."

"You did—the happiest three months of my whole life," he admitted in a grudging tone. "Supremely happy months. But it didn't last, it couldn't last, and you know very well why. Your life was a terrible wreck before I met you. Then you came along and wrecked mine too."

"By marrying you? I believe I'd have died if I let you go. But I knew you, walking around like a wide-eyed kiddy, would fall into a trap; some other woman would land you, and she might have handed you a worse deal than I did. I wanted to save you."

He sneered a little. "Yes, save me for yourself, as the cat would the canary."

"What if I did? Frank dear, I loved you too well, not wisely indeed but too well, dearest. I'd been a worm, dull, earth-bound; you raised me on golden wings to be a butterfly."

"Hot cakes!" he jeered.

"My life was transformed. To me that boy husband, you with the heart of a child, the big soul of a saint, the religious mind and piety of a priest——"

"And oh, the strong body of a young man!" he threw in witheringly.

"I never believed men had any religion in them. I had no cause ever to think they had till I met you. Men were just animals a little bit more interesting than pet Boston bulls. The only Bible I ever touched was the Gideons' in the hotel, and that I used to tilt the mirror to see if my skirts were hanging all right. The nearest I ever got to saints was when I played *Elizabeth* in *The Holy City,* and the head of my son, John the Baptist, was brought to me covered on a tray. That really was a head of cabbage with a napkin over it. As regards God, I was shut up in an *Alias Jimmie Valentine* safe. You knew the combination, opened the door, brought me the light.

"You were like some great wonder of nature, her masterpiece; the longer I looked the grander you became. You were a man in everything but mind and experience, and you were better in mind than thousands of experienced men I'd met. A man as you were shouldn't be just a grown-up boy. You were a temptation with your simplicity."

His voice was dry and caustic. "You never resisted temptation much, did you?"

She smiled in whimsical fashion. "I usually get rid of temptation by yielding to it." And she sank on a rude little bench opposite him.

"My memory brings back that I heard you speak that very line on the stage. You spoiled all the simplicity of me; made a mess of the nature's masterpiece as you call me; killed the boy and let the miserable ghost of a man walk in his body. You're just acting now; your very pose, your words, everything about you tells it. Just staging a great big telling scene. You've always acted, and it's in your blood. You came of a long generation of actors. You're acting a part now; the lady who's trying to come back. You'd sooner act than eat."

"Sometimes I've acted and didn't eat, dear. An actor is the only fool who'll work when he's hungry and knows he won't get paid."

She glanced about; up at the towering trees where wild birds were drunk with the sunshine; through the vista of woods winding back into the heart of the hills; the path serpenting leisurely among daisies and buttercups. Her eyes lighted on a dead chestnut with one remaining branch, and that thrust into the arms of a sturdy young oak beside her. What a poor-looking union! And how unfair of the

chestnut to impose on that oak! Her eyes came back incontinently to the crystal water spurting out from the bosom of the mountain.

"I suppose I do show up badly in all this natural scenery. I belong to dim lights and dusty painted canvas woods and stumps made out of nail kegs covered with paper. But speeches or no speeches; my talk is tinged by my career naturally; it's my local coloring; mountain background or backdrop, actress' profession or just plain womanhood and wifehood, I was never more earnest than in this moment. And I declare honestly I was tempted sorely to let you go and escape me."

"You didn't yield to that temptation, however."

"I couldn't face life without you. Something in my soul cried out for you."

"Did you ever know you had a soul before that hour?"

"I didn't think about my soul. I had too many other things on my mind."

"Do you mean things—or human beings?"

"Heavens, you can act nasty!"

"So would you act if your soul was shot full of holes."

"But I lost by that marriage too, remember. I gave you everything and had little left for myself. I was a capable actress when you took me as your wife. I was doing Shaw, Ibsen, Wilde, the finest playwrights. Where am I today? A cheap chaser in vaudeville that doesn't really want me; where I don't belong at all. I could no longer act good things when I lost my husband, my heart, my home. Only the shadow of my talent stayed with me."

"And only the shadow of my manhood stayed with me. You had your acting still. I had nothing left but hard work—and the war."

"And of course, acting isn't work; just child's play. Darn hard play sometimes, take that from me, boy." She paused and chewed at her lower lip. "Frank, you're not like yourself in this talk. Boy dearest, boy that I loved years back, man that I love now, don't be so unkind."

"I can't bluff, Margery, can't act a part like you. Remember how I muffed the few lines you gave me in one show. The actors said I was just your 'excess baggage'; that an actress' husband always is. One of them asked would I paint the scenery for your next bill, and an-

other said the only thing I was fit for was to paint tomatoes red; I didn't even know how to paint my mouth. So I'd better be honest and speak out the God's truth to you. Work or play, the stage is yours for the rest of your life. You had me for three months in marriage. That's all you'll ever have of me, understand. I'll never live with you again; I simply could not."

He looked sourly at her. Where the water bubbled near her feet was a lush bunch of violets. What a contrast between that hard, worldly, sinful face of hers that was no longer a mask to him, and those dewy, sweet little buds! She lowered her head at the finality of his tone, bent down and dipped her thin fingers in the water bubbling over the edge of the mossy old tub.

Then she raised her head and tossed it recklessly; drew out a cigarette and knocked it on her thumb nail. "Have you a match?" she asked carelessly. He gave her one. She took a long puff, threw back her neck and blew a perfect ring into the air.

"My usual luck," she said lightly, though her face was very hard just then. "My plans for the future usually turn into regrets for the

past. Luck! If I try to make a hit with pink tea and moonlight and roses in my flat, the woman next door cooks ham and cabbage and ruins my—my atmosphere. When I find a horseshoe and count on good luck, it's always nailed to the hind leg of a mule.

"Boy, in your philosophy—perhaps I'd better say religion, for you have it—isn't there such a thing as a second chance, just one more chance? If there is, why not give it to me, the thing I never got; no, not from my very cradle in my aunt's theatre trunk? My father I never saw; I heard he was in China, but my aunt never spoke about him. I must have come from an incubator, for I never knew my mother. I was on the stage before I could spell. For that matter, I can't spell yet. I started my kid days in a box factory, and I've had the gloves on ever since, trying to give success and happiness a solar plexus slam, but my hearing has never been hurt by deafening applause. If a man worked as hard as I've worked, you'd make him president of the U. S. A., and he'd have broken more Commandments than I ever did."

She threw the red-coaled cigarette on the lush violets and pounded her fist into her palm.

"You're not treating me fair and square; you're using your man's prerogative to be brutal to me." And he saw tears gathering in her tired eyes.

CHAPTER XVII

One of the neighbors was coming along with two buckets for water. Frank arose and went farther on into the woods, giving Margery a glance to follow him. They had now more privacy. She saw he wanted to tell her something, make some sort of confession, but couldn't, as if his tongue wouldn't act. He was like a priest who had to talk in church, but hated to do it through reverence for the holy place.

She tried to help him. "Frank, what are your plans?"

"Only this one: I'll leave Coaltown tonight, and go where you'll never find me. You've made me a homeless wanderer, a bum; that's what your kind of love does for a man."

Hard lines etched around her mouth; her eyes slitted as she looked at him. "So that's that," she said crisply. "Old Margery's to be left again, high and dry. But, Frank, don't think I'm blind. It's not good for man to be alone, and he usually isn't alone. During our

years of separation, you've met another woman who has all that I lack. She loves you, you her." He gave her a quick, angry look from where he was sitting, his back up against a tree. "There was no innuendo. Understand me, Frank. I don't say you've done wrong. Feeling love for such a woman isn't sin. You would not yield to it. Your nature wouldn't let you."

His tone was dry, while his damp fingers tore up the grasses about where he was sitting. "I'm glad you believe me a real man anyhow, not a clever actor who can say and do things he doesn't mean. Even at that, I'm not the man you make me out to be. You've thought about my good qualities so much that you see them double; you're positively drunk on them."

"Then I wish never to be sober," she threw in gallantly.

"I've been a man so far, yes, Margery, fighting a man's battle; the hardest battle in the world—with himself. How long I can keep it up I don't know. Lately I've been under a fierce barrage, and I've been nearly knocked down and out. My God, of nights I've prayed like a seven-year-old for strength not to wrong another woman. Why, kneeling by my bed at

night, I've punched my own head till it ached from my knuckles to crush out the thoughts—the thoughts."

"You're still my man who said his prayers," she breathed with an odd little catch in her throat. "I see *who'll* lose out."

He looked up at her like a pitiful big boy, and his tone was reeking with anxiety. "Do *you* think I shall?"

"I meant myself," she replied with flippancy.

"So you see I'm not a hero, just a poor beast of a man. I've been a Judas. I've *looked* love I couldn't give, have no right to give at a good woman, a hidden saint, and God's curse and the curse of her Irish mother will follow me and fall on me. Now when the harm's done, I'm going to run away like a cur."

She was highly agitated. On stage to keep down her nerves sometimes, she crushed a handkerchief in her palm. She was doing that now with a daisy that wilted rapidly in her feverish fingers.

"You a cur! Oh, God!" she turned her face away from his devouring gaze, up toward the rocky heart of the great woody mountain, and let the cool stealing from the green fan her

cheeks. "Frank, do you realize there are few men like you? It seems you don't catch that. I'll confess you're the lone one of your sort I've ever met. Nature's noblemen, is it any wonder that women, weak, sinful, shallow, like me, adore the very shadow of a man like you!" She turned back, and her odd smile was twisting the one side of her face. "Your physical beauty—and strange for an Irishman, you're hardly conscious of even that—your upstanding splendidness caught my eye, but it was your moral beauty that captured my fickle old heart; it was really. I love you all the more just because of that moral beauty, though I'd love you if you were bad enough to be put in jail. You could be my salvation. You've been the one clean, wholesome influence in my life. What I never had in myself, I sought in you, my husband; just as the poor wind-tossed, faded leaf flies for protection to the hollow at the foot of the oak."

He studied her keenly, coldly. "That sounds stagey to me, Margery, as if you were making a speech behind the footlights to a man you didn't love at all, and you were just doing it to pay the rent. That style of yours tripped me once; it sent me flying on my nose, but never,

never again, mind. I'm off the stage for life."

"Which means that I'm on for life, if the stage will have me much longer," she said ruefully. She looked at him biting his lips, and she leaned forward a little. "You did love me once, didn't you? a great deal too. Oh, those golden, God-given weeks in our dear little flat! the picture of the Madonna and the Christ Child you bought for me—how I love that! I have that picture yet in my trunk. I've lost a lot of other things and didn't care, but I'll never lose that. It was all so real, no make-believe at all. But that tiny flat was big enough to house our family skeleton, and then one day the horrid thing fell out of the closet. If only sins could be buried forever like corpses!" She sighed, almost sobbed: "When I'm sick of life, I think of that dear little flat; our little suburb of heaven."

"No real man can find heaven with a fallen angel, Margery; you might have foreseen that."

"When the angels fell, they had to leave heaven. Do you know I so pity those fallen angels. When your life united and blended with mine, as those two darling little streams are mixing, I saw more of heaven than I ever

saw before, just as the brook joining the sea has a bigger chance to mirror heaven in its breast."

Her eloquence made little impression on his present mood. To him it was all of a piece with her stage playing; he couldn't perceive she was in earnest. His tone was frigid. "How could you have heaven in your breast when there was a lie there, the living lie you told me?"

"I had my heaven all the same. I hugged it to my heart, all the while feeling it wouldn't last. Nothing nice ever lasts very long with me. Knowing my joy was an infant that would soon grow into vigorous sorrow and clutch its hands at my throat. But I can't blame you; you acted as a man like you would act all the way through—and I don't know that I'd want you different." She looked at him as a mother would at a very small boy. "If you'd not been made a man, Frank, you'd have been a lion. I—I'd have been made the mangiest sort of cat."

She laughed harshly. That laugh touched him a little. It was only the dry bones of the full, living laugh he'd heard on their wedding day.

"I did take a rotten advantage of you, and

the Lord knows I was old and experienced enough to know better. But you don't know how I loved you, and you don't know that I love you more today. And I need you, dear, I do need you; need you more now than I ever did." She swung over to him swiftly and knelt at his knees, her clenched hands holding him, her tear-wet face upturned. "You're mine, mine!" she muttered fiercely. *"Husband!* you must protect, cherish the woman you married, even though you don't love her now. Perhaps her penitence will win you back; fan the early fire into white-hot heat again. She'll leave nothing undone. When on your knees as I am here, there you saw your duty to run away from that other fine woman." She paused and let her weighted words drive home. "Did you then see *your duty also to be near me?* Run away from the other woman; that *is* your duty. Come back and stay close to me; isn't that your duty too?"

Her hot hands holding his felt his mighty fingers twitch and grow cold, but he didn't tear away. She couldn't have held him for a minute if he tried to get loose. He sat there with his head bowed so low she couldn't see his eyes.

"My *duty!*" he mumbled. "Margery, you're right. I never saw that before."

"For better or worse till death do us part," she breathed fiercely, triumphantly. "What God hath joined together——"

"God had nothing to do with that marriage of ours," he blurted out.

"Oh, yes, He had. It was done with book and priest, and that marriage brought God into my life; brought Him there for the first time," she declared fervently. "In that day you gave me your name and yourself. You belong to me since that hour. Haven't I a wife's rights? You're mine first, last, forever. The voice of duty, of conscience, of your Church bids you back to my side."

She clapped her soft hands on his smooth, firm cheeks with an air of proud possession, and then he elevated his face, and she never forgot his expression. His one big palm gripped her shoulder, his other turned up her face to his, yet she knew he wasn't going to kiss her. His eyes were those of an eagle looking at something mysterious to find was it clean. He spoke with darkened brow.

"I plead guilty to forgetting my duty to you. Now *you* be honest with me. That's been

my one and only sin since I left you—neglect. During those years we've been apart, have you led the life my wife should?—the clean life I've led; yes, even in the army, where a man might be excused for forgetting his God and his soul and his wife—there I led the clean life, because I was consecrated to you. Tell me the truth, to me who never told you a lie. Did you —do you come back *clean?"*

She tried to lie, but couldn't; oh, never under those terrible eyes, and the worst of it all, she couldn't get free; couldn't even sink her shamed head. His fingers were holding her chin in a vise.

"No," she faltered in a child's whimpering tone, *"no!* I come back tainted. I did not lead the right life since you left me. Oh, for God's sake, release me! don't look at me!"

At that he let her go; pulled himself abruptly away from her touch. He arose and she feared he would leave, but he didn't.

"How could I?" she blazed, now that he wasn't looking at her. *"How* could I? How could I escape from such a network of temptations? I had to go it alone, didn't I? without you; had to fight single-handed. With you I'd have won out, but you deserted. Without you

I went down. The enemy, my own weakness, my old boon companions; they all flocked back as soon as you left; I was in my old dizzy circle again—it was all too much for me. Can the leaf turn back that is swept along in the stream? Never, but a strong hand can pluck it out of the water."

He tottered over to a stump and flung himself down on it. "Don't talk! For God's sake, don't talk any more! Surely you must see it's all over between us now; everything's ended. Oh, don't touch me; don't even come near me. You'll never lay eyes on me again after today. Don't—don't make me hate you! I've never felt hate for you yet."

His strong hands slid up to his face, then locked in agony behind his neck. She saw his fingers tearing at his hair. She stood over him, gazing down at the noble head clasped in those poor coal-chipped hands; the head that she must never caress again. How crushed and broken he was—and she had done all that! Men killed the thing they loved, but did women too? And Frank after her had gone through the horrible war! Those hands of his, how cut, scarred, disfigured with the blue marks the coal left! How she longed to kiss

every bruise on those knuckles! How little there was in his slavish life after all; a life that daily took him into the bowels of the earth, where all kinds of terrible disaster and blood-curdling death lurked; a life amid poisonous gases, abysmal darkness, far from the clear, sweet air of the upper world!

And oh, those accidents, those explosions, the coal and timbers often falling without warning! In a few crucifying seconds a handsome young man's soul flung into eternity to meet angels weeping over his untimely taking off; that soul sadly looking back, like Lot's wife, at a virile body converted into a bloody pulp. No footlights to blaze upon the tragedy; no 'cello to wail mournful music; no audience to applaud: all pitch-dark and silence.

Yet, even yet her mad love for him urged her selfishly. "Frank, I must go away from you today *alone?* Isn't there any hope for me at all?"

"No hope for you as there's no hope for me," he muttered, not looking up.

When women's hearts broke, they screamed and shed tears. When men's hearts broke, they looked like this boy before her. His love was priestly, and he refused to offer it to a defiled

idol; he couldn't. His heart was a holy grail. His strength was as the strength of ten because that heart was so pure—and what must be the sufferings of such a nature as his! Then she did it! She flung him the "handful of stars."

"Boy dear, lift up your head!" Her tone made him look at her, and she saw his eyes were bloodshot under the torture. *"You are free!"* she cried fiercely, rapidly, as if she feared her courage might fail. "I'm going to give you the light and the sun. There's no hope for me; there shall be for you. See, there is still some of the woman in me, even in me. Go to that other woman you love; marry her; be happy."

"Law is law," he said quietly, "whether divine or human law."

"I've been mean and contemptible too long, but I love you," she persevered. "Perhaps that love can excuse my wickedness. Life played the same trick on me that I in turn played on you. I, a century older than you, married a boy. A man, years and years older than myself, married me, a girl. That husband was living when you gave me your name, a drunken, worthless sot, a thief, everything that you were

not. He'd left me, and I rejoiced that he was gone. He died in the West only a month ago. I love you so much I've tried to urge a claim that doesn't hold in the sight of the law and surely never in the sight of God. I always thought everything fair in love and war, but when a man fights a clean battle as you've done, everything isn't fair in love."

He looked at her vacantly, and she saw he hardly took it in. "I don't believe you, Margery; no, I do not. You always run to extremes. A lie won't make happiness."

"It's well then that I came prepared. Something warned me to do it. Something foretold I had as much chance as a one-winged butterfly in a storm. Here is my marriage certificate. Why I kept that hated document I'll never tell you. There's his name and mine. Here's the page out of the *Billboard* with his welcome, too welcome death notice. Note the paper tells we were once joint stars, also it notes that his wife, Margery Rambell, survives him. Dates exact too. What could be clearer?"

She pushed the theatrical weekly before his eyes. And he read the truth.

She reached down softly, got his strong fingers and pressed them passionately to her

lips. "By this dear hand, holier to me than any Bible, I swear to all that!" A lot of things melted in his mind just then; mists faded away. He seized her wrists and kissed her tenderly. She lifted her face bravely to receive the kiss. "So after all, Frank, I'm giving you the sunrise of a new day in life. You're still in the golden twenties and have years left you to enjoy life."

"And, Margery, you're giving yourself——?"

"Peace at last, dear. I've done one gorgeously grand thing in my life—and for my poor despised sex. Frank, when—when the other little girl comes to you, don't think hard of her ever because of me. Don't judge Woman by the horrible specimen of womanhood I am; oh, don't. There was a fairy princess who was invisible till love came, then she was revealed. Love brings out whatever bit of good may be hidden in even the worst woman, like the corpuscles in her blood."

He held her hands against his heart, and she was happy that he did. He looked kindly into her eyes, his face growing more boyish. "Margery, if I've been a brute this afternoon, forgive me, if you ever can. There's a world of

good in you, do you know that? I want you to understand and remember I can never, never forget you. You were my first love. A man never can forget that first love; it's impossible for him ever to forget."

She hung her head a little. "But how can you—oh, the things about me you have to remember; my lying, cheating you——"

"I'll always remember you as you are now, a really fine, good woman with a woman's heart. Have you reformed once and for all?"

"I—I don't quite know, Frank. Could Eve go back into the garden after she sinned?"

"But didn't Eve, the mother of us all, go to heaven at the end?"

"It's nice to know she did, poor unlucky Eve. But you see she had Adam with her. I'm in worse luck," and she smiled sadly. She paused and then looked into his fine eyes for a while. "Frank, I *will*—for your sake; yes, I will! You'll be a handful of stars in my dark to show me the way. And I know *it won't be for very long.*"

He was puzzled. Then she coughed to show him.

"This terrible ache in my chest, this hacking at night, the cold sweats; I know what it all

means; it also took my aunt; so it's not mysterious. I'll soon play Camille's death scene in dead earnest. I'll soon take to the long road whose season runs longer than forty weeks. And now I'll be able to do it with a much easier conscience."

She turned away and looked listlessly at all the wild beauty about them. "There's not much left to say except this: The first night I saw you get on your knees to say your prayers, I wanted to laugh, but I didn't. I lay awake a long time thinking seriously about your prayers and you. Then you remember you taught them to me. And wasn't I the quick study? I murmur those sacred words, taken from your lips; murmur them often and often, Frank." She looked at him wistfully. "You still say those same dear old prayers. When you do tonight, this great night of your freedom and happiness, when you murmur those sweet little prayers to your God"—her voice rose in a wail of misery; it was torn out of her—"for Christ's sake, Frank, think of me; include me! You'll have love to keep you holy; I won't. Yours is the only kind of love worth the name." She pivoted on her heel and spoke over her shoulder. "And in memory of that

first love of yours, of those happy three months I gave you, try to forget all the rest; do forget the years of your life I spoiled. Those three months may yet prove my salvation."

She swept away from him as if carried by the wind. He watched her elastic step, her graceful swing as she vanished through the bushes. He hurried down to the spring to keep her in sight—his last sight of Margery Rambell! Then he heard the sounds of a jitney, and a cheap-jeweled hand with a damp handkerchief waved and waved. He remembered a baby's little white crape hanging on a heart-broken door.

And Margery Rambell went higher and higher up into the peaceful mountains, like the boy with his Excelsior banner, to shoot back again into the rut of her hard career.

CHAPTER XVIII

FRANK came home early on Christmas Eve to find that his wife had a toothsome supper of mackerel, and since everything was joyous in preparation for the great Noel morning, he wondered that Peg wasn't merrier. He didn't like to ask her, but he was sure she'd been crying.

Gosh, it was nice for the Clearys to have the house all for their own again. No more boarders needed; weren't two able-bodied men bringing wages into the home twice a month? Certainly more than enough to keep four people—though Peg had already whispered there'd be five in the spring; so Andy was very impatient for Easter.

Then when supper was over, Peg told him about Margery. The theatrical lawyer sent word as she'd previously instructed. It was the death of the trouper surely, ever careless of her own life and limb. And the death of a fearless heroine! Margery was a star-shell; she shone brightest in her final fall.

Her dramatic vaudeville act took her into the distant West. Strange that she should meet her end in the town where her husband was buried. It was as if the dead man reached out and claimed her at the last, for she was laid in the grave with him. But life is full of queer coincidences.

It was a matinee, and the house was packed with children. Margery's act was on. She made her entrance in the heavy storm cloak. A few minutes later came her change of costume, which meant she stripped the cloak off and was revealed in the flimsy finery of her evening gown. A careless stage hand, far up in the flies, bored with the whole proceedings, lighted a cigarette. He thoughtlessly or accidentally threw away the match. It fell down and caught in the flounce of Margery's skirt. The dress blazed up. The usual fool in the audience blared Fire!

But Margery was true to her gipsy clan, that produced Eddie Foy, standing, a clown, with his wig singeing, while he tried vainly to counsel the milling mob in the great Iroquois fire at Chicago, the very grease paint melting down his cheeks; the gipsy troupers that gave birth to daring little Margot Kelly, who seeing

a vase of "fresh" flowers afire on stage, lifted the red-hot vase in her naked hands, and carried it out while her fingers blistered, before the audience could stampede like a herd of brainless cattle and trample one another. "The audience first!" is the actor's gospel, as "Women and children first!" is the sailor's, and Margery was faithful to her creed.

She wrapped the heavy cloak quickly about herself and stepped right into the trough of the footlights. Her rare presence of mind averted the panic. "Stop! *Stop,* friends, for God's sake! before you get yourselves hurt! There really isn't any fire! See the show out!" she shouted. And her powerful, odd voice halted the rout. She shook her fist playfully at a little boy who was clapping his hands in terror: "Mama spank! *Play!*" was her command to the orchestra, and the anguished leader, who understood what she was doing, gave a hasty signal.

A crash of jazz music shook the walls, and she bowed off with a smile. The curtain fell, and she fell behind it, just as the flames burst out from beneath the heavy cloak. The electrician threw a bucket of water over her. In her excruciating agony she allowed herself the

luxury of a few moans, since the jazz outside was loud enough to drown them.

"Thank God, those kiddies are safe!" she sighed as she lapsed into unconsciousness. "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee— Pray for us Sinners!"

Her wandering fingers groped into her bosom, and she drew out a soldier's picture which they found crushed in her hand at the hospital, but she was dead by the time the ambulance took her there. The picture was buried with her.

She was heavily insured, and poor Margery, it was all in Frank Snow's name.

Peg saw her adored man's head sink down till his brow lay on the little table. She stole out and closed the door; only a Christmas candle burning red in the room, a ray of love and hope. She knew her darling was saying his prayers now—for that other woman whom he had known as wife.

Frank raised his head. Peg shutting the door caused a draught that whispered around his neck like the kiss of a ghostly woman's lips. On the wall hung the picture of Mary and her Babe which he'd bought for Peg as he'd done for Margery. In the golden-red dimness from

the candle and the sparkling silver of the tears in his eyes, he saw Margery's lovely face up there in the Madonna's frame, her great, sad eyes and her wreath of bright hair.

She smiled at him as she did on their wedding night when the crowd had gone, and they were alone together, just man and wife. The shadowy mouth moved and spoke to him, and his heart caught it all:

"Frank, the world did its worst to us both. I've held your babe's glorious soul before it left heaven to live in the body you gave it. I've blessed Peg's child and yours with my immortal kiss. *All is well.*"

And to the eyes of his spirit her golden hair became a saint's nimbus. Many sins had God forgiven Margery because she loved so much.

THE END

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